

CINEFANTASTIQUE®

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SPAWN
EVENT
HORIZON
MIMIC

Jodie Foster,
explorer of the
infinite, on the
sci-fi filming.

CONTACT

Volume 29 Number 2



FILMING SHAQUILLE O'NEAL AS "STEEL"

D. Voigt

CINEFANTASTIQUE



THE REVIEW OF HORROR FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION, YOUR GENRE NEWS MONTHLY

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And also in the same issue, go on location to Bratislava for the exclusive behind-the-scenes production story of the making of Robert E. Howard's *KULL*, starring *HERCULES*' Kevin Sorbo. Interviews include Sorbo and co-star Tia Carrere, first-time director John Nicolella, producer Raffaella DeLaurentiis, and makeup supervisor Gianetto de Rossi!

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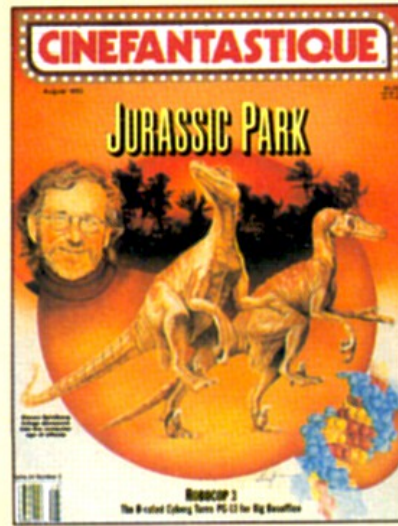
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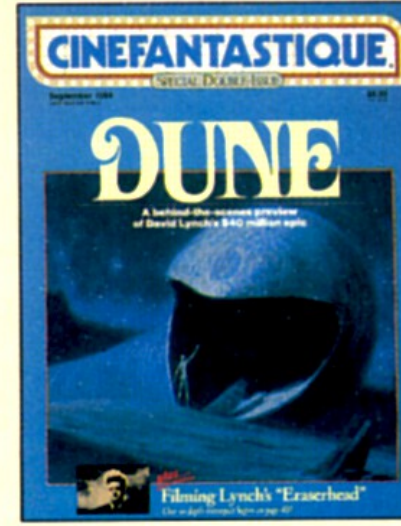
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"The Magazine with a Sense of Wonder"

AUGUST 1997

It is no secret that cinematic science-fiction has never kept pace with its literary counterpart. There have of course been notable exceptions, but most of what passes for science fiction on screen is actually fantasy that has had more to do with extrapolating from the inner mind than into outer space, using the apparent verisimilitude of technology to sell old mythological constructs in a shiny new suit. Scientific speculation and sophisticated writing are not of primary concern, so much as the impact of the special effects and the ability of the recognizable archetypes to appeal to audiences who might not want to sit through 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY, let alone ALPHAVILLE or SOLARIS.

If this appears dangerously close to a typical critical rant about the "lack of sophistication" in current genre films, let me point out that I have not abandoned my position that form can be as important as content. Rather, while enjoying some of the visual exercises prevalent today (like THE FIFTH ELEMENT), I think there should be room for a wider variety of genre films with ambitions that lean in other directions.

Therefore, it is gratifying to note that director Robert Zemeckis, whose genre work almost always emphasized pure fun and fast-paced entertainment, has taken on a somewhat heftier project with CONTACT. This time, Zemeckis is working on a piece of science fiction that explores what might really happen if Earth is ever contacted by another form of intelligence from the stars, and he tries to infuse the subject not just with the frenetic pacing which marked early efforts but with the humanity he brought to FORREST GUMP.

Of course, the premise has been used many times, but the inevitable cinematic treatment boils down to some kind of variation on the usual invasion scenario, in which scientific probability or even possibility is not a major consideration. We hope that Zemeckis' latest effort, based on the novel by the late Carl Sagan, performs well enough to legitimize serious science fiction again.

Steve Biodrowski



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EAGERLY AWAITED

PHANTOMS (Dimension)

Fans of Dean Koontz's books have hardly been pleased with filmic adaptations like the incoherent *HIDEAWAY*, but they could be no less pleased than Koontz himself. Still, fans have reason to await this effort, which was scripted by Koontz himself, who also serves as exec producer. "From what I've seen of his previous films, he has every right to be pissed off," said co-producer Joel Soisson. "Some of them have been a little dubious. Here, we're using Dean Koontz's script from Dean Koontz's novel. And the beauty of it is, it really is his vision. It's the first movie that's ever been made of a Koontz novel where he has been an active participant in protecting the vision of the film." Pictured right is star Peter O'Toole.

Steven Lehti

October 24



RELEASE SCHEDULE

Upcoming cinefantastique at a glance, along with a word or two for the discriminating viewer.

compiled by Jay Stevenson
(unless otherwise noted)



ALIEN: RESURRECTION (Fox) October

To no one's surprise, this troubled production will not meet its originally scheduled opening date of July 25. Sigourney Weaver reportedly clashed with French director Jean Jeunet, a talented visual stylist who used to handle the "mise-en-scene" of his highly regarded collaborations with Marc Caro (*DELICATESSEN*, *CITY OF LOST CHILDREN*), while leaving the actors in the hands of the co-director. Winona Ryder co-stars in Jeunet's U.S. debut, which resurrects a new Ripley from a blood sample of the original character, who died in the previous outing. *ALIEN: RESURRECTION* was supposed to get the franchise back on track after the disappointing *ALIEN 3*; instead, it seems to be turning out to be another disappointment.

CONTACT (Warner)

July 11

Director Robert Zemeckis (*BACK TO THE FUTURE*, *DEATH BECOMES HER*), gets serious with this adaptation of the novel by Carl Sagan, scripted by Michael Goldenberg. Jodie Foster (*SILENCE OF THE LAMBS*) stars as a scientist who pilots a vehicle built from designs received from aliens. Unlike Zemeckis, Foster was not an aficionado of the genre. Did director and star ever discuss some of his favorites? "Yes, we did," said Zemeckis. "Jodie, it turned out, hadn't seen a lot of science fiction movies or a lot of horror movies, of which I'm a great fan. So as we were working, I'd say, 'You ought to look at *THE TIME MACHINE*. Check out some William Castle movies, you know.' So I would talk to her about some of the classics that she may have missed. I think she's checked into some of these films and really appreciates them." SEE PAGE 26.

EVENT HORIZON (Paramount) August 1

Lawrence Fishburne, Joely Richardson and Sam Neill star in a tale of a deep space rescue mission that encounters "the most ancient of all evil," says director Paul Anderson (*MORTAL KOMBAT*). SEE PAGE 8.

MIMIC (Dimension)

July 18

Mexican auteur Guillermo Del Toro (*CRONOS*) makes his American debut with this science-fiction horror pic. The story is about a genetically engineered solution to a budding infectious disease that has killed dozens of people. However, the cure proves worse than the disease when the experiment goes horribly awry, creating a new kind of predator able to mimic its prey—human beings. SEE PAGE 24.

MORTAL KOMBAT: ANNIHILATION (New Line) November 28

Originally scheduled to open head to head with its director Paul Anderson's *EVENT HORIZON*, this sequel has now been pushed back from August 1. Producer Larry Kassanoff insisted that the film, as originally planned, was ready; however, the new schedule allows extra time to complete an additional 100 digital fx shots.

A SIMPLE WISH (Universal) July 11

Michael Ritchie directs Martin Short as an inept fairy godfather trying to grant the wish of Mara Wilson (*MATILDA*). Kathleen Turner also stars, as Short's rival.

SPAWN (New Line)

August 8

As part of its Summer juggling act with *MORTAL KOMBAT: ANNIHILATION*, New Line Cinema has taken this adult comic book adaptation and pushed its release up two weeks from August 22. Michael Jai White stars as the title character, a government assassin who is double crossed by his boss (Martin Sheen) and then returns from hell to exact revenge. K.N.B. Efx provided the character's shape-changing body armor. Melinda Clarke (*RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD*, *KILLER TONGUE*) co-stars. SEE PAGE 7.

STEEL (Warners)

August 15

Hollywood double-think runs rampant this summer. Hitting the screens are two comic book adaptations, starring black actors in the title roles, both with the same first initial in the title—*STEEL* and *SPAWN*—and they are scheduled to open just one week apart. Other than that, however, the resemblance seems minimal, with writer-director Kenneth Johnson's PG family market angle as opposed to the ghoulish Gothic trappings of *SPAWN*. SEE PAGE 14.



WARRIOR OF WAVERLY STREET (Trimark) August 8

This little film was originally supposed to be released by Trimark (the theatrical division of Vidmark Video) last summer. But the competition was deemed too stiff, so the release was pushed back to 1997 and scheduled for March—usually a slow time of year. The *STAR WARS* trilogy scared off the Trimark brass, who have opted again for a summer release. See CFQ 28:9.

SWORD & SORCERY

KULL THE CONQUEROR (Universal)

Raffaella De Laurentiis continues the family tradition begun by her father Dino with *CONAN THE BARBARIAN*, based on the character created by pulp fiction writer Robert E. Howard. Now, the younger De Laurentiis produces an adaptation of one of Howard's other memorable characters, King Kull, who must defend his crown from the villainous Taligaro and the resurrected evil goddess Akiasha. Kevin Sorbo (of TV's syndicated *HERCULES* series) takes the lead role. Television director John Nicolella (*MIAMI VICE*) makes his feature debut. The script is by Charles Edward Pogue, who also scripted Raffaella De Laurentiis's previous period fantasy epic, *DRAGONHEART*. Tia Carrere (*TRUE LIES*) co-stars in the \$35 million production. Pictured left, Sorbo and Carrere.



August 29

HOLLYWOOD GOTHIC

THE PHANTOM RETURNS

Dario Argento follows up WAX MASK by remaking Gaston Leroux's classic.

by Alan Jones

With his latest production, *WAX MASK*, playing to appreciative audiences in Italy (where it is known as *M.D.C. MASCHERA DI CERA* in an attempt to give the vague *HOUSE OF WAX* remake a hip ID4 sheen), Dario Argento is now turning his attention to updating another Gaston Leroux classic. But, to be safe, he will wait until next year before putting his stamp on *IL FANTASMO DELL'OPERA/THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA*. Argento said, "Leroux died in April 1927, and the recently revised copyright laws state that seventy years must pass before an author's written property goes into public domain. Plus, Universal has held the rights to the story ever since their Lon Chaney silent version in 1925."

The film is to be produced by Dario's brother, Claudio Argento, on a lavish (by Italian standards) budget of \$10-million, and Argento is using the imposed delay to get every detail exactly right. He's commuting to Paris on a weekly basis to write the script with veteran screenwriter Gerard Brach, who collaborated with director Roman Polanski on *REPULSION*, *DANCE OF THE VAMPIRES*, and *THE TENANT*. Argento said, "I wanted to work with a French scriptwriter because the film is set in Paris at the end of the last century in the time of the Belle Epoque. I needed someone who would know all about that period, the atmosphere, and the opera milieu. I looked at many writers, but the moment I met Gerard Brach, I knew he was the right person. For a start, he was born the same year Leroux died, and he's as strange as I am. Gerard has a phobia about leaving his apartment. He hasn't left it for twenty-five years now. How could he write movies like *THE BEAR* and *THE LOVER* without doing outside research? Here's someone weird I knew I could work and get along with!"

PHANTOM OF THE OPERA will be shot on location in Budapest, Hungary, because, "Gre-



After producing the successful *WAX MASK*, directed by Sergio Stivaletti (above), Dario Argento has decided to direct a remake of *PHANTOM OF THE OPERA*

nier, the architect of the Paris Opera House, also designed two others—in Crackow, Poland, and Budapest. Paris would be an expensive city to film in. I'm not sure I want to go to Poland, and I'd already produced Michele Soavi's *THE CHURCH* in Budapest and had the opera house in the back of my mind for something else when this subject was first mentioned. Interiors will be shot at Rome's Cinecitta Studios."

Asia Argento, the director's twenty-one year-old daughter and the star of *TRAUMA* and *THE STENDHAL SYNDROME*, will play Christine, the ingenue singer and reluctant Phantom protégée. "I would have been insulted if my father hadn't asked me," she said. For the title role of the cellar-dwelling Erik, Argento's wish list includes Gerard Depardieu, John Malkovich, William Hurt, and Anthony Hopkins. He remarked, "I must cast an important star for the commercial viability of the project. The secondary character Raoul, Christine's love interest, will need a strong actor, too."

After *PHANTOM OF THE OPERA*, Argento will produce an-

other classic remake for his *WAX MASK* director Sergio Stivaletti. While the makeup man-turned-director favors *THE GOLEM*, Argento wants him to consider *THE MUMMY*. Argento said, "Sergio did a good job on *WAX MASK*. Audiences and critics have responded well to his new take on an old-fashioned idea. I think it's worth doing again, but under less trying circumstances than we had making *WAX MASK*, because of Luci Fulci's untimely death." □

Obituaries

by Steve Ryfle

Tomoyuki Tanaka

On April 2, the world of *cinéfantastique* lost one of its true champions. Tomoyuki Tanaka, the man who created *Godzilla*, died in Tokyo of a stroke at age 86. It was Tanaka, a producer with the Toho Motion Picture Co., who brainstormed the idea for Japan's first-ever *kaiju eiga* (i.e., monster movie), which became a huge success and gave birth to an entire genre of giant-monster and sci-fi pictures. Tanaka, in turn, became one of the most prolific producers in Japanese film history, with over 200 credits, including all 22 *Godzilla* movies.

Tanaka was born to a wealthy family from the outskirts of Osaka on April 26, 1910, and entered the film industry in 1940. He produced a handful of films before the end of World War II; then between 1945 and 1948, he made about a half-dozen more. In 1948, he was among a group of producers, actors and other employees who left Toho to protest the company's purging of 1,200 supposedly communist workers. He returned to Toho in 1952 and, two years later, created the world's favorite monster.

Toho's special-effects films were Tanaka's domain, and he made pivotal decisions concerning scripting, marketability, and other matters. It was Tanaka who introduced the concept of "monster vs. monster" movies with *GIGANTIS*, *THE FIRE MONSTER*; who capitalized on Russia's 1957 launch of the Sputnik satellite and the ensuing interest in space travel with *THE MYSTERIANS* and

more on next page

Short Notes

As predicted in our Top 50 article (28:12), Tim Burton's next project looks like a studio-approved, commercially safe project. He is planning to direct **Nicolas Cage** in a new version of *SUPERMAN*. ☺ **Uma Thurman** (*BATMAN AND ROBIN*) and **Ralph Fiennes** (*STRANGE DAYS*) are in talks to play Emma Peel and John Steed in Warner's big screen remake of *THE AVENGERS*. ☺ **Alfonso Arau**, who directed the masterpiece of magic realism *LIKE WATER FOR CHOCOLATE*, has signed to helm the futuristic epic *METABARONS* for Universal. The project is based on a French graphic novel about a dynasty of space warriors, by cult writer-director **Alexandro Jodorowsky** (*EL TOPO*), who will co-script the film with Arau. ☺ **Brad Pitt** (*INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE*) has signed to play the title role in *MEET JOE BLACK*, an update of the 1934 classic *DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY*, starring Frederick March. **Martin Brest** is producing and directing the film, scripted by **Bo Goldman**, which will also star **Anthony Hopkins**. ☺ **Rob Bowman**, not series creator **Chris Carter**, will direct the *X-FILES* flick. □

SPICY CITY

Ralph Bakshi takes his style of adult animation to the small screen on HBO.

by Patrick Legare

"Adult animation to me was anything in my day that wasn't Disney," said Ralph Bakshi, the director behind such non-Disney animated efforts as WIZARDS and AMERICAN POP.

In between phone interviews to promote his new HBO series, SPICY CITY, the father of adult animation unabashedly revealed that, despite his fame as an animator, he wants to be known as an artist of the canvas kind. "What I really want to do is paint pictures—that's the big secret," he said. "I've been doing it for 20 years." But to his hardcore following of fans (Spike Lee and Quentin Tarantino included), he remains the man who brought such classic animated fare to the screen as FRITZ THE CAT, HEAVY TRAFFIC, COONSKIN, and LORD OF THE RINGS.

Five years after he suffered his greatest disappointment (COOL WORLD), thanks in part to executive over-involvement, the 59-year-old animator steps back into the animation ring as creator and executive producer of SPICY CITY.

"I'm not even doing the animation. I didn't want to get into that sort of thing again. I hired all New York writers, young guys from the East Village. I went after that specifically, and that was the hard-



A mobster pays the price for losing a drug shipment in SPICY CITY's second episode. Bakshi (inset) exec produces the series.

est thing to sell HBO."

SPICY CITY is a six-part anthology series that adapts horror, sci-fi and noir stories/formats from pulp 'zines of the '30s and '40s into a futuristic New York City setting. Each 30-minute episode is its own entity with only one continuing character: a sexy club owner named Raven (voiced by Michelle Phillips, formerly of the Mamas and the Papas.) The trademark Bakshi touches are all there in the first two shows: some violence, some intrigue and tons of sex all wrapped around a city that still reflects the New York Bakshi has always known.

"A lot of [the stories] revolve around detective mysteries. They're love stories, internet stories, stories about people selling body parts. A lot of great characters came out of the pulps: Superman, John Cotto of Mars, Flash Gordon, The Shadow. There was a lot of good writing if you like that sort of writing."

Although Bakshi did not write the scripts for SPICY CITY, his influence over his young staff writers is obvious. "They never wrote a script" before SPICY CITY, according to Bakshi. "Talent is talent, that's the most fun for me—people who aren't jaded and don't have all the answers; they don't know what could or can't be done. They're poets, novelists, and they're of all persuasions: they're Japanese, Orien-

tal, Puerto Rican, Black, and homosexual. What I'm saying is I wanted a different point of view. There's another America out there that no one knows."

The fire of revolution that defined the 1960s still burns brightly in Bakshi. In 1972, while shocking the world with FRITZ THE CAT's sexual promiscuity and drug use, the movie was really sending a larger message about the state of a nation that was struggling with riots, racial barriers, Vietnam and the sexual and drug revolutions. The sex just drew you in to see it. The '90s have not changed Bakshi a bit.

"SPICY CITY is the same thing," he said. "The stories are very political. They're about our problems without being overt about it. They're about what the future holds for us, good and bad. They're also about the changing of America, the burgeons of people, the great ethnic mix we are, which I love. I go down to Houston Street all the time. Look what they did to Times Square, you want to shoot yourself."

Not to mention you can't see any good movies there anymore.

"I realized that I wasn't interested in box office," Bakshi continues. "You've got to go after box office. I went after what I was going through, emotionally, at the time."

SPICY CITY's debut episode, "Sex Drive," premieres on July 11 at midnight.

continued from previous page/BATTLE IN OUTER SPACE; who developed Toho's "body transformation films" (THE H-MAN, THE HUMAN VAPOR), focusing on humans mutated by radiation. Tanaka got the idea for RODAN from a dream, and hired a professional sci-fi novelist, Takashi Kuronuma, to write a story upon which the script was based. Seeking to broaden the *kai-ju eiga's* audience, Tanaka in 1961 made MOTHRA as a "modern fantasy," complete with tiny twin singing women to add a feminine appeal.

He also produced other types of films, including works by directors Senkichi Taniguchi, Hiroshi Inagaki, and Akira Kurosawa (including the acclaimed YOJIMBO and SAN-JURO). And he worked hard to export Toho movies, traveling abroad and arranging co-productions that infused foreign capital and American actors, increasing the overseas marketability of several features; not coincidentally, Tanaka's films have been seen around the world more than those of any other Japanese producer. Tanaka also took a few missteps in his career: it was his idea to make Godzilla a hero and to increase his appeal to children—a move he later regretted ("This character change was responsible for his decline," he said in 1985. "It was a mistake."). He atoned for it years later, resurrecting the beast as an infernal villain in GODZILLA (1984).

Tanaka remained active in the business in his later years, holding the title of Executive Producer on the 1990s Godzilla movies. In recent years, however, his frail health forced him to hand most of the actual production chores over to his successor, producer Shogo Tomiyama. The latter-day Godzillas were among the most successful films in Japan (both GODZILLA VS. MOTHRA [1992] and GODZILLA VS. DESTROYER [1995] topped the yearly domestic box-office charts), concluding Tanaka's long string of box-office hits that began over four decades ago.

Tanaka died just 16 months after Godzilla perished in DESTROYER, the final entry in Toho's legendary series. Sadly, he will never see TriStar's GODZILLA remake, a project he had anticipated eagerly. The new film holds the promise of erasing the stereotypes about Godzilla and making the King of the Monsters a worldwide phenomenon of unprecedented proportions. It would have been Tanaka's last great shining hour.

Production Starts GODZILLA

TriStar's lumbering behemoth finally rises from its dormant slumber—it's been four years since they announced the project. Matthew Broderick and Jean Reno head the human cast for the dynamic duo of Roland Emmerich and Dean Devlin. Filming takes place in Los Angeles, New York, and Hawaii. Release is slated for Memorial Day next year.

DOCTOR DOOLITTLE

Fresh from the success of THE NUTTY PROFESSOR, Eddie Murphy steps into another fantasy remake. Betty Thomas directs the 20th Century Fox production.

SPAWN

ILM refugees take the reins of comic epic.

By James Van Hise

SPAWN producer Clint Goldman previously worked as the senior producer at ILM on *THE MASK* but feels that SPAWN is a better film. What made *THE MASK* good, he said, is that it did things that people hadn't seen before. SPAWN, which opens nationwide from New Line Cinema August 8, also has that quality, according to Goldman.

"They'll definitely see things they haven't seen before," said Goldman. "You may have seen things like the dinosaurs in *JURASSIC PARK* but you haven't seen something like the Violator who battles Spawn. In that respect it's different. We're creating our own version of digital Hell where the final battle takes place."

On SPAWN Goldman is reteamed with fellow ILM-mates Mark Dippe, making his directing debut and effects supervisor Steve "Spaz" Williams. "Steve is probably the

best computer animator in the world," said Goldman. "Mark was a very good technical supervisor [at ILM], and I was involved in the making of films by using the computer. We met at Industrial Light & Magic and we worked together for eight years on different projects. Mark and Steve worked together on *JURASSIC PARK* and *T2*, and Steve and I worked together on *THE MASK*. Then we worked awhile on commercials together where we could have more of a supervisory responsibility, and where Mark or Steve could direct. Last year Steve directed a big Citron commercial, and Mark directed a number of different commercials to get us the experience, especially for those guys, that they needed to segue into making a major motion picture, which is what SPAWN is."

Todd McFarlane, the comic book creator of SPAWN, was aware of Industrial Light & Magic and was impressed by what the company had been doing, and



Michael Jai White stars as the superhero from Hell, based on the bestselling Image Comic character created by Todd McFarlane, who picked the ILM team.

this is how the former ILM team became acquainted with McFarlane. They approached McFarlane and introduced him to the head of New Line, and three years later SPAWN was in full production there.

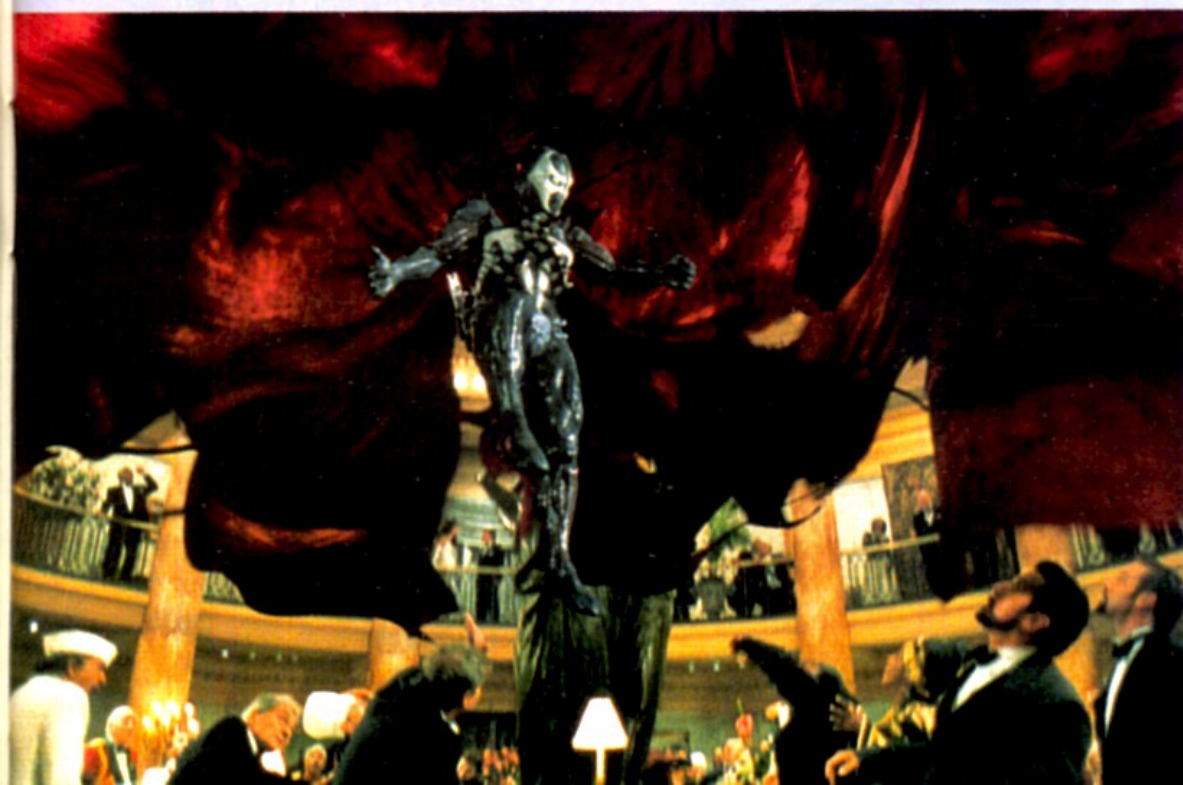
"I had known Todd for some time through some mutual friends and we tried to help them set up and sell the project [SPAWN] at Sony," Goldman recalled. "We were not involved at all, but were going to work on the project. After working on setting up the project at Sony, we took the project to New Line with Todd's blessing and after a couple months we were able to set it up. Todd wanted it to be done a certain way, and I think, for the most part, we're succeeding. Todd also was willing to trust new people. So was [New Line chief] Mike [DeLuca], so I give Todd a lot of credit for having faith in people who didn't have the sort of directing or producing film credits attached to their names to put the movie together, which is sort of in keeping with who Todd is.

Todd is a maverick in his own right. He broke away from Marvel to start his own comic book company. He looks at Mark and Spaz and me as sort of buddies who have got the ability to break away from Industrial Light & Magic and put our own project together, even though we're still working with Industrial Light & Magic on this movie quite a bit." □

Violator, Spawn's nemesis, a giant monster rendered CGI by ILM.



A CGI Spawn with flowing cape descends from above, effects by ILM supervised by former ILM animator Steve "Spaz" Williams, who hired his former bosses.



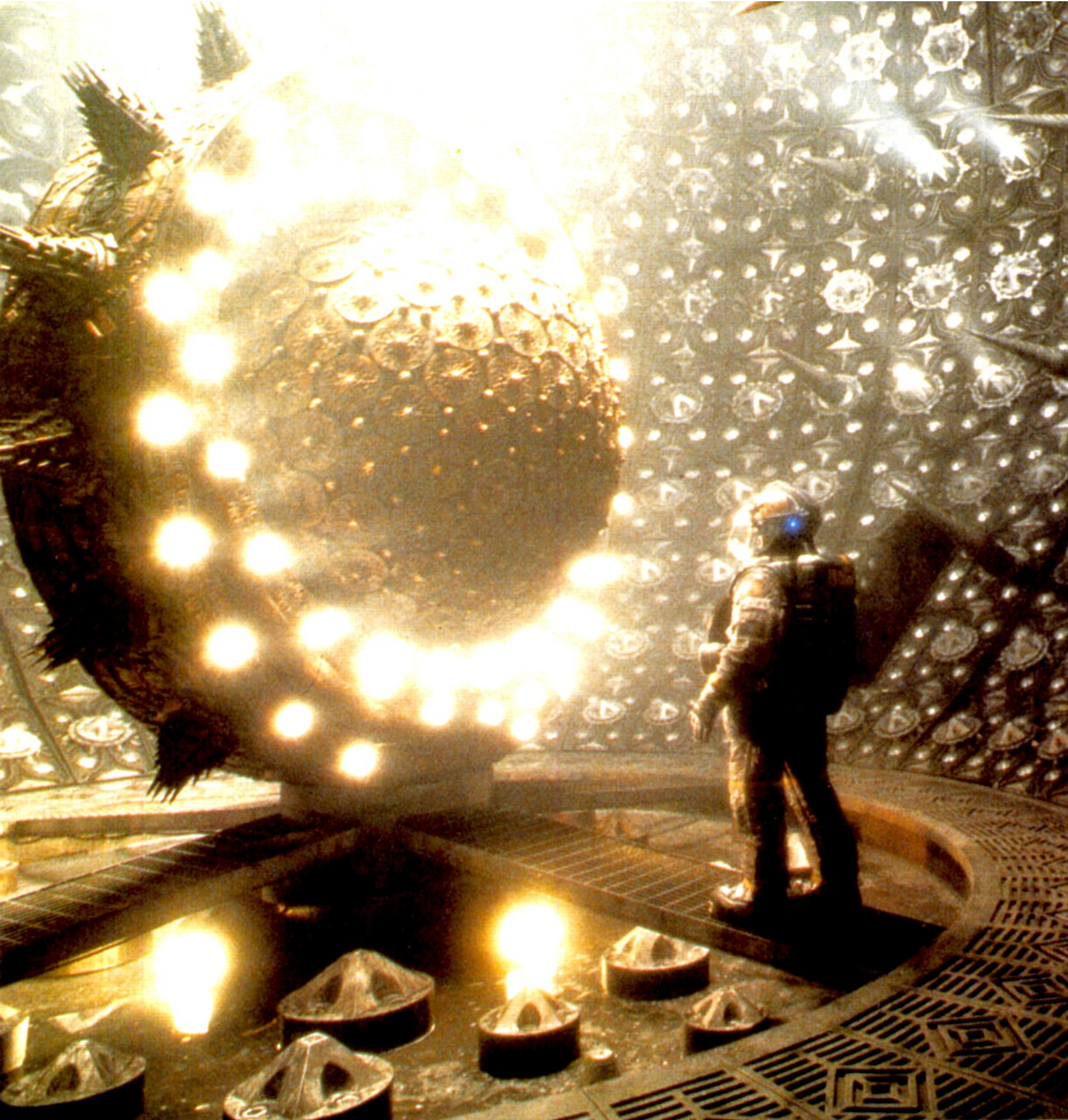
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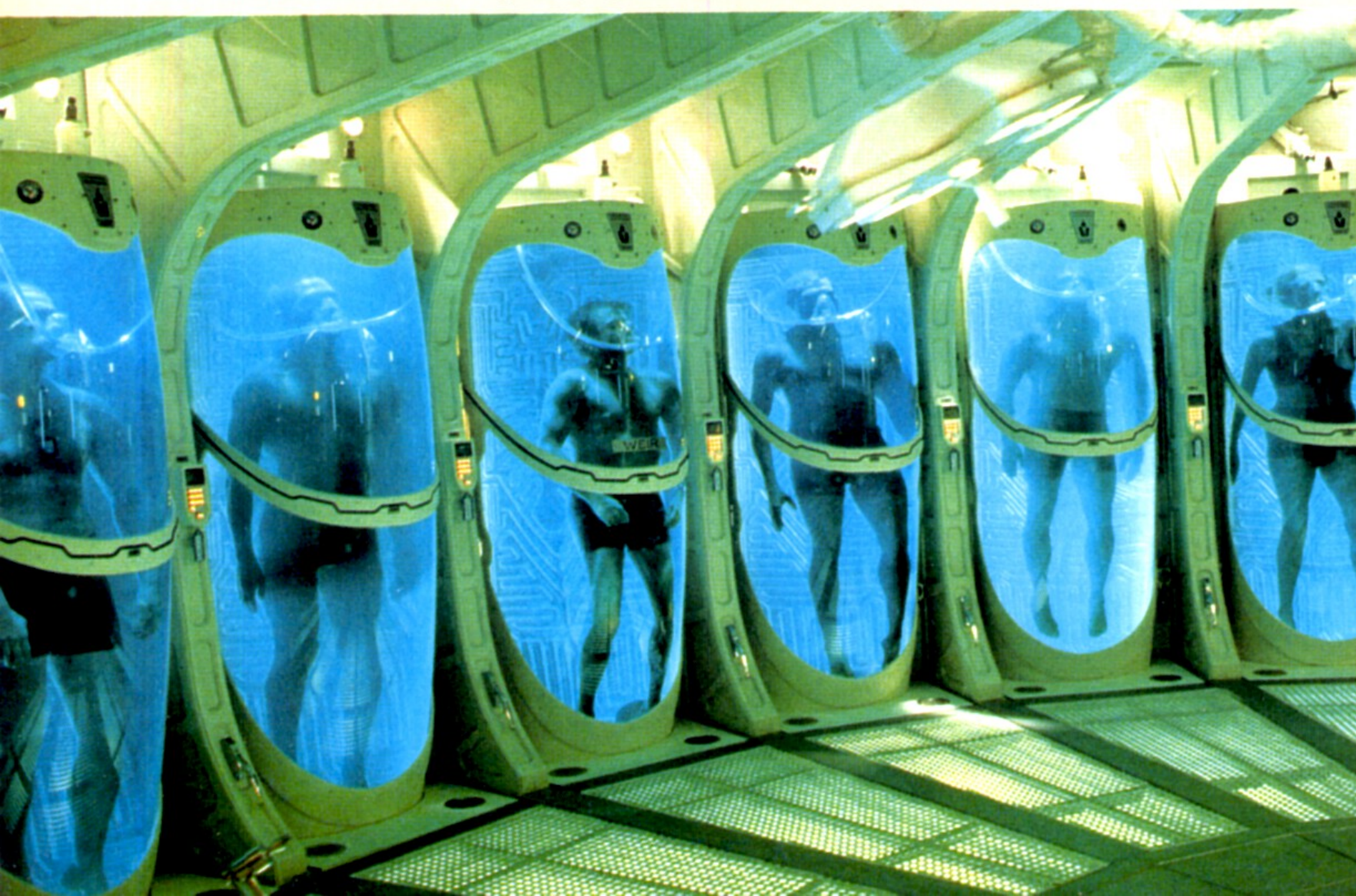
By Alan Jones

WARNING: Through journalistic necessity, information about the plot of *EVENT HORIZON* is discussed in this article. Though the surprise ending is not revealed, some twists leading up to it are hinted at. As a result you may prefer to read this article after the event disappears from your viewing horizon!

In 2046 a rescue mission is sent to the outer reaches of the solar system to salvage the



Members of the rescue mission (Jack Noseworthy, above; Kathleen Quinlan, at right) explore the *Event Horizon*, a prototype spaceship lost for seven years inside a black hole. Below: The crew of the rescue ship *Lewis and Clark* awake from their hibernation chamber. Opposite page: Entering the mist-shrouded hull of the mysteriously abandoned ship.



Event Horizon, a prototype spaceship missing for the last seven years inside a Black Hole. But what the recovery crew of the *Lewis & Clark* craft actually find on this intergalactic *Marie Celeste* goes beyond any of their deepest fears. Because on board the doomed vessel lies the terrifying answer to one of mankind's most often asked questions. That shocking medieval secret lies at the bloody heart of *EVENT HORIZON*—where “Evil Waits Forever”—Paramount's August 1st

EVENT HORIZON

mankind's darkest question—in outer space.

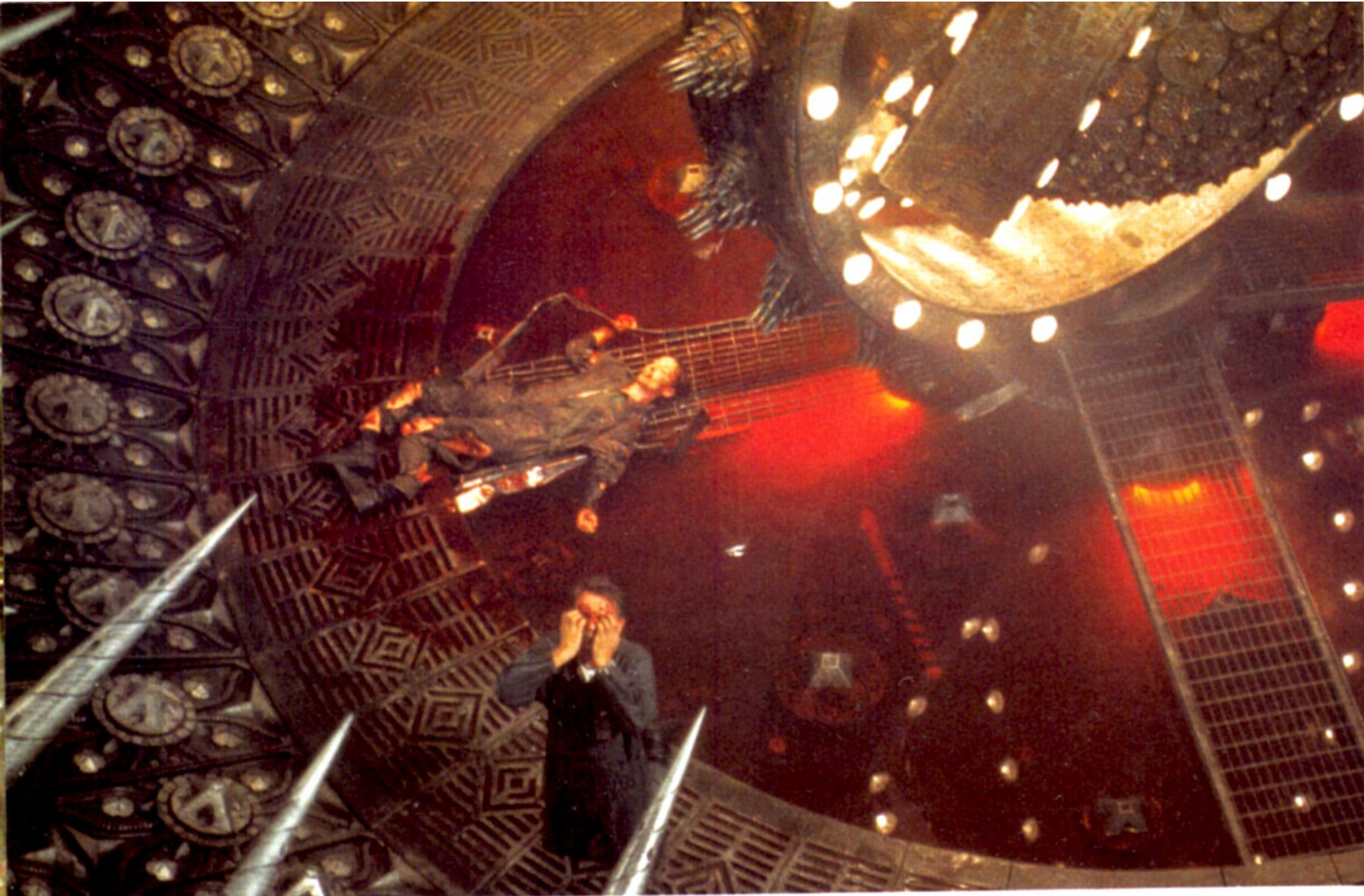
entry in this year's pulse-pounding science fiction sweepstakes.

Written by Philip Eisner and produced by Laurence Gordon, Lloyd Levin, and Jeremy Bolt, **EVENT HORIZON** stars Laurence Fishburne (**OTHELLO**), Sam Neill (**JURASSIC PARK**), Kathleen Quinlan (**APOLLO 13**), Joely Richardson (**101 DALMATIANS**), and Sean Pertwee, son of late **DOCTOR WHO** star Jon Pertwee. The director is young Briton Paul Anderson, who made his U.S. debut with the boxoffice hit **MORTAL KOMBAT**.

It was another film that Anderson and his partner, producer Jeremy Bolt, were going to make (through Impact Pictures, the company they formed together in 1989) that led indirectly to **EVENT HORIZON**. Anderson explained, "I was about to direct **SOLDIER**, a science fiction movie written by David Webb Peoples, who wrote **UNFORGIVEN** and co-scripted **BLADE RUNNER**. Peoples will never admit to it, but it's basically Rutger Hauer's story as the Replicant. Remember his death speech in **BLADE RUNNER**—'I've seen things you wouldn't believe...'? Anyway, the military decide that this Replicant Soldier is outdated, and they try and get rid of him. It's set on a godforsaken planet in the back of beyond and could be described as **SHANE** in space"

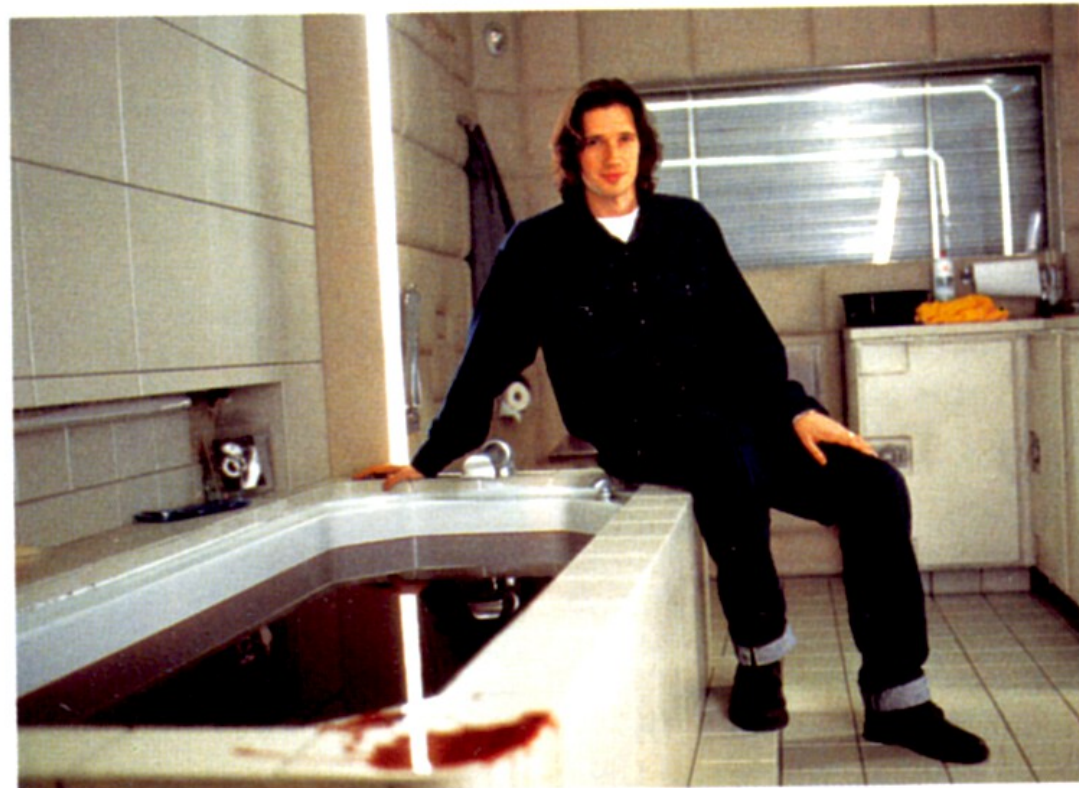
Set to star Kurt Russell, that Warner Bros. project ground to a temporary halt because the actor had so many prior commitments. The revised Hollywood start date is now fixed for February 1998. The postponement meant Anderson was free to make another picture—"But I didn't want to direct the **MOR-**





TAL KOMBAT: ANNIHILATION sequel even though I was offered it. Spending a year doing the same thing all over again, admittedly on far-flung exotic locations, didn't really excite me."

What did excite Anderson was an old script that had been around for a while. **EVENT HORIZON** had been developed by producer Laurence Gordon under the auspices of his Largo company. Anderson continued, "When Larry left the company, it was one of the scripts he wanted to take with him, so it got caught in litigation. Sure, it has been around for a while, but it hasn't been available for anyone to make. As soon as it was, I read it and became tremendously enthusiastic about its potential."



What the rescue mission finds on the *Event Horizon* is a "pure black beating heart of evil proving God does exist," according to director Paul Anderson (above). The result is some macabre mayhem for the crew, whose worst fears and sins come back to haunt and destroy them.



Anderson's enthusiasm stemmed from his being a fan of the genre who grew up watching science fiction and horror-fantasy movies. "That's what threw me when I started reading the script. I thought it wouldn't surprise me. I stopped after the first five pages when a crack team of experts go out into space. I thought, *I know exactly what's going to happen: he'll die; she'll turn out to be the villain; and they'll battle this ridiculous space monster.* But I decided to read some more, and 20 pages in I had to revise my initial opinion. I got more interested. Then

I got 50 pages in and shouted, 'What the fuck is going on?' *EVENT HORIZON* is the first script I've read from start to finish without taking a break. I usually read scripts very slowly, but this one was just an amazing rollercoaster ride."

He continued, "Like myself, scriptwriter Philip Eisner is a real genre enthusiast. He's seen everything. And what he's cleverly done in the *EVENT HORIZON* screenplay is take a stock set of characters, plus a stock situation, and subvert every predicament they find themselves in. Every single expectation you initially have over what *EVENT HORIZON* is actually about is dashed within minutes. The person you think will end up being the hero doesn't, and the introverted scientist you're sure will become a man of action becomes something else entirely. It was when Dr. William Weir, the scientist played by Sam Neill, started to go insane that I just freaked and thought, *I can't believe this!*"

One of the major reasons Anderson liked the script so much was that he felt it harked back to a time when the fantasy genre dealt with Big Ideas. He explained, "Movies like *THE OMEGA MAN*, *SOYLENT GREEN*, and *LOGAN'S RUN* had a Grand Theme—a dazzling central conceit. But that was forgotten by '80s science fiction when it became nothing but the dumbest of action genres designed for muscle-bound stars spouting stupid one-liners. I also wanted to see a return to the great scary movies of the '70s like *THE OMEN* and *THE EXORCIST* which dealt terrifyingly with the supernatural. Mainstream Hollywood hasn't properly chilled the bones for ages. Such films became the property of the B movie brigade who unleashed *FRIDAY THE 13TH* on the public. In *EVENT HORIZON*, I intend to terrify audiences like Robert Wise did in *THE HAUNTING*. I don't think I'm revealing too much when I say that showing a multi-tentacled alien monster is perhaps the worst thing a film of this nature can do—which is why we don't do it! Instead, these men of science, whose God is high technology, go into the far-flung corners of the universe and find

"The story is the star, so we could cast whoever we wanted," said Anderson. "It's a tribute to Eisner's script that we could attract such picky actors."



Lawrence Fishburne (left) and Joely Richardson (right) star as Miller and Starck, two members of the rescue mission sent to recover the *Event Horizon*.

themselves confronted by the most ancient evil of all."

With his imagination suitably fired by Eisner's script, Anderson went to Paramount and told them he was interested in making a landmark science fiction movie with *EVENT HORIZON* and nothing less. He continued, "I wanted their support in crafting something with the impact of *ALIEN*. That and *BLADE RUNNER* revolutionized the way science fiction movies looked. But enough already—there had to be another vision available. I set out from the start to do something unique in terms of the visual look and unexpected scares. It's a classic haunted house movie—set in space like *ALIEN*—or like *THE SHINING*. The labyrinthine Overlook Hotel has just become the maze-like spacecraft. Take away the science fiction trappings, and our cast could be travelling to a house on the edge of some dark moors where they must either give into their fears or learn to deal with them."

Observers have dubbed *EVENT HORIZON* "HELL-RAISER in Space" and, even more pointedly, an American-

ized version of Andrei Tarkovsky's 1972 Russian classic *SOLARIS*. Anderson mused, "Hmm. *SOLARIS*, possibly—with the dull bits taken out! Spacemen do come across old-style ghosts within the basic framework. That's one of the story's strengths. Dr. Weir originally built the *Event Horizon* as a cathedral to science. That's why we designed the crucifix patterned spaceship by scanning the plans of Notre Dame cathedral in Paris into a computer and then tweaked them around. The ship's engines are the towers of Notre Dame turned on their sides; the antenna dishes are based on gargoyles; and the stained glass windows are a design motif used throughout the entire interior. The whole *EVENT HORIZON* look is Techno-Medieval with brickwork rendered in metal and Bosch and Breugel inspirations everywhere. When the lights are on it's 2001; when they're off it's Dante's Inferno. And in the center of the *Event Horizon* is a pure black beating heart of evil proving God does exist. For the more technological man becomes, the more fascinated he

seems to be with the supernatural."

Principal photography began at London's Pinewood Studios on November 18, 1996, and was completed March 14, 1997. With only one day of exterior shooting in Pinewood's rural back lot—for a sequence where Emergency Technician Peters, played by Kathleen Quinlan, watches a family home video—the production moved onto seven sound stages where all the impressive major sections of the *Event Horizon* had been built by production designer Joseph Bennett (HARDWARE). Anderson remarked, "Our budget has been applied to two major areas. The special effects are costing \$9 million, and we've also spent a lot on building our sets. Apart from the model shots of the spacecraft, there are no exteriors. So I was careful to ensure our huge sets provided the movie with the scope it needed. Because I'm also shooting the film anamorphically, I didn't want it to become claustrophobic in a bad way. *ALIEN³* is the perfect example of that—it felt tiny, small, and low budget. We've gone out of our way to build enormous sets, using mirrors to cheat perspectives, and then shoot them properly. You see everything we built because the *Event Horizon* is an essential character in the story—again, just like the Overlook Hotel in *THE SHINING*."

Anderson was given a free hand in two other vital areas which are sure to differentiate *EVENT HORIZON* from its summer competition. First, he was allowed to go for broke in the gore department. Bob Keen's Image Animation supplied the special makeup effects, including a disemboweling and various body explosions. He said, "The no-apology, R-rated blood-letting was one reason I wanted to make the picture. It turned me on by being so unrelenting and dark. There's some truly terrible shocks in store for the audience. The death scenes have a very medieval eye-for-an-eye mentality. What happens to the crew is their worst fears and nightmares come back to haunt them, and their worst sin becomes their punishment for eternity. That gave us a great range of twisted horror to mine."

EFFECTS EVENT

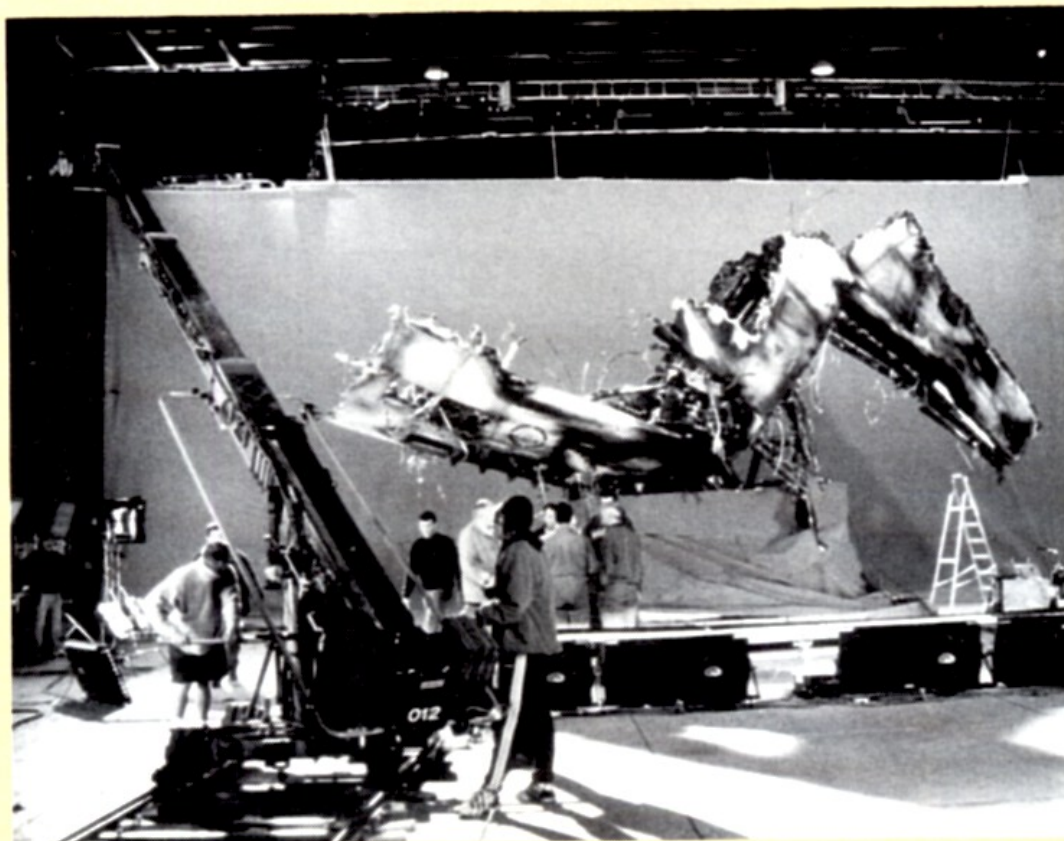
*Supervisor Richard Yuricich on the epic scale of science fiction effects for **EVENT HORIZON**.*

By Alan Jones

Three-time Oscar-nominee Richard Yuricich was the effects expert responsible for realizing Paul Anderson's unique science fiction vision in **EVENT HORIZON**. Yuricich, who began his career as a Rostrum camera operator on Stanley Kubrick's **2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY**, worked on such contemporary genre classics as **BLADE RUNNER** and **CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND**.

Yuricich met Anderson at Warners, where the director was preparing the science fiction epic **SOLDIER**, scripted by David Peoples (**UNFORGIVEN**, **BLADE RUNNER**). But **SOLDIER** was temporarily shelved. Later, Yuricich got a call from Paramount about **EVENT HORIZON**. "Someone had apparently recommended me from **MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE**," Yuricich said. "So I turned up to this meeting, and Paul Anderson was there. I read the script and liked it, although I thought it was really scary. The challenge at the time was to achieve the numerous zero gravity scenes within the story. That's what attracted me—a chance to do something in that area as good as **APOLLO 13** or **2001** even. Paul was clearly a director who would let me try and do it, too, so I couldn't do anything else but sign on."

Yuricich packed up the special equipment for the zero gravity sequences and flew to Pinewood in August 1996. "The script had been rewritten," he sighed, "and the first things to get axed were the zero gravity scenes! They had been replaced with another equally hard challenge—a set-piece dubbed Miller's Crossing, referring to Laurence Fishburne's character having to go from one side of the Event Horizon to the other



In front of a green screen, Richard Yuricich's crew sets up a shot of the 240th scale miniature of the *Lewis and Clark* on the stages of Pinewood Studios.

to save a crew member. Miller knows his friend is about to be thrust into space without his suit, so he lies in wait and tackles him like a football player. Actually that was supposed to happen in zero gravity, too, but hardly shows it to any groundbreaking advantage." He added, "The special devices we'd designed for the zero gravity scenes are in storage, being saved for another time. The only zero G now in the film require someone being pulled out of a set on wires. Some of the sets were then turned on their side to get the actor through the doors. Nothing special, but very effective."

The main problems Yuricich faced on **EVENT HORIZON** stemmed from the scale of the model spaceships, which were constructed before he came on board. He explained, "The ships were done in 240th scale with 72nd scale sections. The Pinewood stages weren't large enough to get a miniature the size you'd really need to not only blow up but for the physical interaction sequences. The

240th scale ship was 30 feet long, and the stage is only 28 feet high. We had to reconfigure the models in the strangest and absurdly weird places just to get the shots. We had to do the same on **BLADE RUNNER** where Ridley Scott was forced to turn miniatures on their sides."

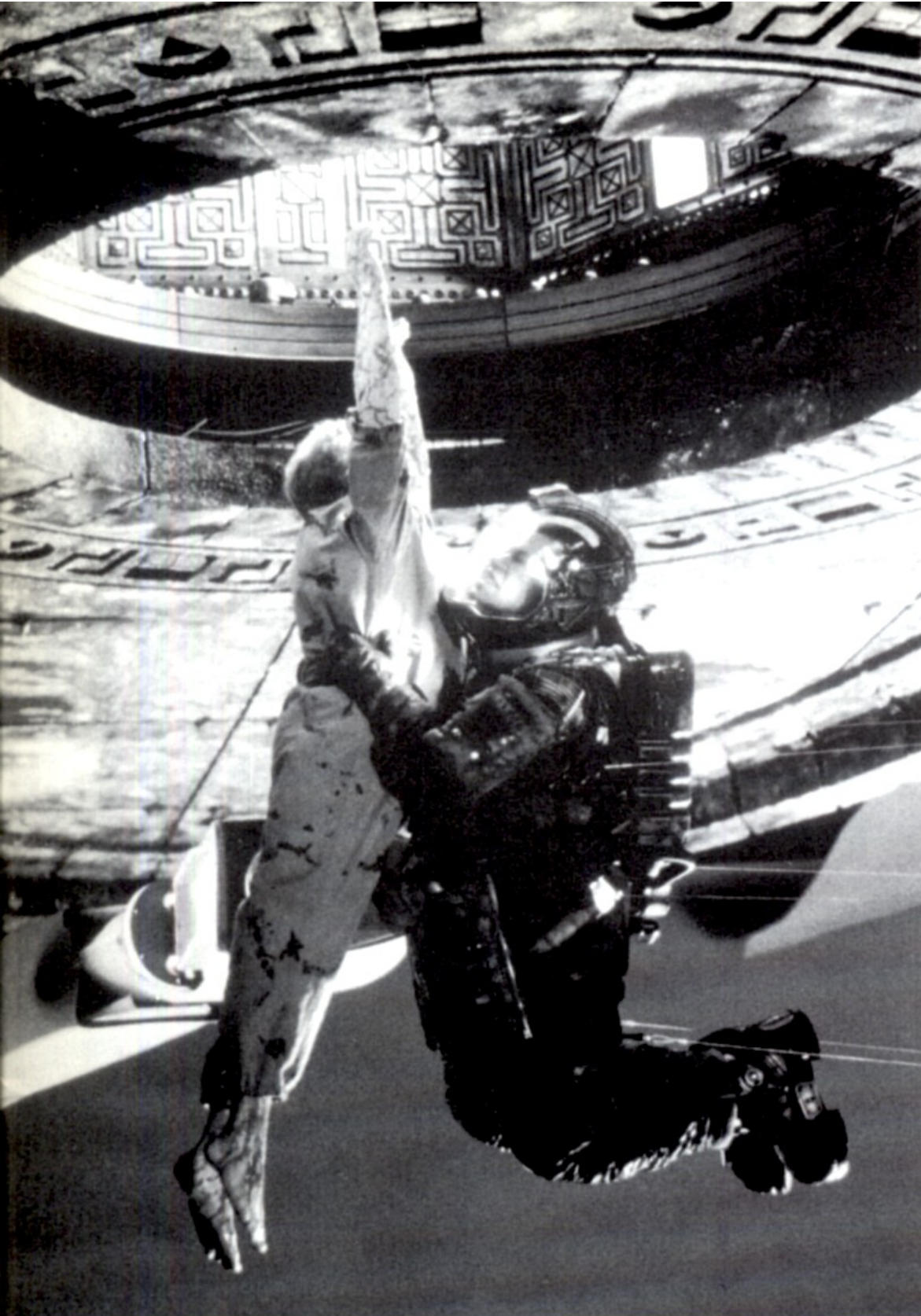
He continued, "There's a scene where the rescue team have to enter the Event Horizon from their Lewis & Clark via a tube we dubbed the Umbilicus. Well, if the Event Horizon is supposed to be 5000 feet long, that means a 240th scale model of the Umbilicus sized up next to it would have been 120 feet long, not to mention the extra 15 feet on either side for the crew to be able to service it properly. We had to build an elevated structure on the outside and used mirrors to achieve the effect of length. We made a 30-foot section three times as long by putting our green-screened actors in the far distance, then the middle, and finally the close-up. 3D digital painting then cut the coverage together

for the effect we needed."

In Yuricich's estimation computer-generated imagery has not only revolutionized his industry; it has also meant complicated event movies are getting made on time. He explained, "Some of the classic science fiction movies I've worked on needed about eight months of post-production to get done properly. But interest rates often meant that wasn't possible. Suddenly the interest you'd normally pay matches the cost of an extended effects budget and the visuals being farmed out to competitive digital houses—Cinesite and CFC in the case of **EVENT HORIZON**. That's the main virtue of CGI, as I see it. The movies cost the same, but computer digitals mean they can get done faster, cutting down the interest rate money, which can then get channeled back into making the movie as good as it could possibly be."

A major challenge for Yuricich was the appropriation by Anderson of the Ice Mountain Universal Tour Ride gimmick for one elaborate set. He said, "Laurence Fishburne has to run down this revolving corridor followed by a huge flame. It's disorienting enough on the Universal Tour, and here it was very hard for him to do. To stay focused he had to look down at the ground and only into the lens at various points in the action. The set was hydraulically rotated, and Fishburne was followed down the corridor by a dolly containing a bright light source to edge light him and light up the walls. Then the optical flame was added, at two different speeds, to speed it up and make it more threatening."

Look very closely at the Event Horizon and you may notice a couple of in-jokes. Because Yuricich was the man who



Planned extensive use of zero-G was cut back to a few instances; in this case, Fishburne is rigged on wires to carry a corpse from the abandoned ship.

added an R2D2 robot to the detailing of the CE3K mothership, the model shop crew included a STAR WARS Millennium Falcon on their craft. "CE3K had an enormous amount of visuals, but most were hidden. Over 100 shots had matte paintings," he said. "EVENT HORIZON has 100 shots which are just simple cases of doubling or quadrupling the sets to give an epic scale. No stages exist anywhere in the world to build sets as vast as Paul wanted. And Paul's constantly moving camera work precluded the use of a hanging miniature. So rather than hang a miniature we multiplied the sets by CGI. The most impressive is the 10-foot one we seamlessly turned into a 600-foot long panorama."

The most complicated effect involved a window shattering in the Event Horizon and an air canister breaking free from a wall. He said, "Paul wanted the canister to hurtle around the

room and then lead the camera out through the cracked window. The stuff on set was easy to do as we under-cranked the camera, shooting at about 8-10 frames per second, drove it through the set, and picked out five positions where the CGI canister would hit. Neil Corbould, the physical effects man, caused sparks or lamps to fall off the wall at each point, and then the camera was pulled through the window. The problem was the window on set was eight feet wide and that had to be matched with a shot on the scale model where the same aperture was three-quarters of an inch wide. So we had to paint in a few frames where the join will occur and add jumps and zooms to disguise the segue. The movie will become a cartoon for a few frames at this instance. That's what Paul wanted and what we had to give him no matter how complicated it was." □

"Philip Eisner's script takes a stock situation and cleverly subverts every predicament," said director Paul Anderson. "Every expectation is dashed."

He continued, "People do have a great ability for scaring themselves, though, and we play on that. A movie we looked at a lot before shooting was SEVEN. Audiences think that was extremely explicit, but it left so much to the imagination. It showed a bit, then backed off, and people filled in the blanks with their own sick minds. Here, we use the spaceship with all its dark corners and unpleasant places in much the same way. People can imagine what's in the shadows better than we can ever show them. In fact, I asked SEVEN scriptwriter Andrew Kevin Walker to give the screenplay a little rewrite before we began production."

Second, Anderson was encouraged to cast the best actors, not stars. He said, "The remit from Paramount was the story was the star, and we could make it with whoever we wanted. I've always been a huge fan of Laurence Fishburne, so he was a natural to play Captain Miller, head of the rescue mission. It was a real thrill to be working with him. He's an actor very rooted in the reality of a situation and always wanted to know what his motivation was for doing everything. I must say he kept me on my toes. I think the whole cast is brilliant. Sam Neill, Kathleen Quinlan, and Joely Richardson are all picky actors. None of them are paid \$20 million a picture, so money isn't a factor in what they choose to do. They want high-calibre scripts they can get their teeth into. Science fiction is often seen as a cheesy genre in the acting community—partly the fault of those big '80s science-action movies again. It's a tribute to Philip Eisner's screenplay that we could attract such a strong cast. I've also used the cast to support the twists and turns in the story. The actors may be all playing against type—or not—I'm not saying!"

Filming progressed as smoothly as possible, considering Anderson had an August 1, 1997, American release to meet. "I've cut the movie as we've been going along. I always maintain a relaxed set anyway. Everyone will tell you that. I refuse to scream or shout. If you hire great people who do their jobs properly, you don't need to. That's the key to good filmmaking."

Anderson couldn't be happier with the result. "Science fiction has been around for 80 years now, and people don't seem to be tired of seeing familiar things as long as they are given a twist on the usual clichés. That's the real thrill for science fiction buffs—the unexpected within the formula. That's what EVENT HORIZON has in spades. Plus, it's fucking scary. Because it deals with people's own inner demons tormenting them, it never stops being frightening. This has everything the fantasy fan loves all rolled into one." □

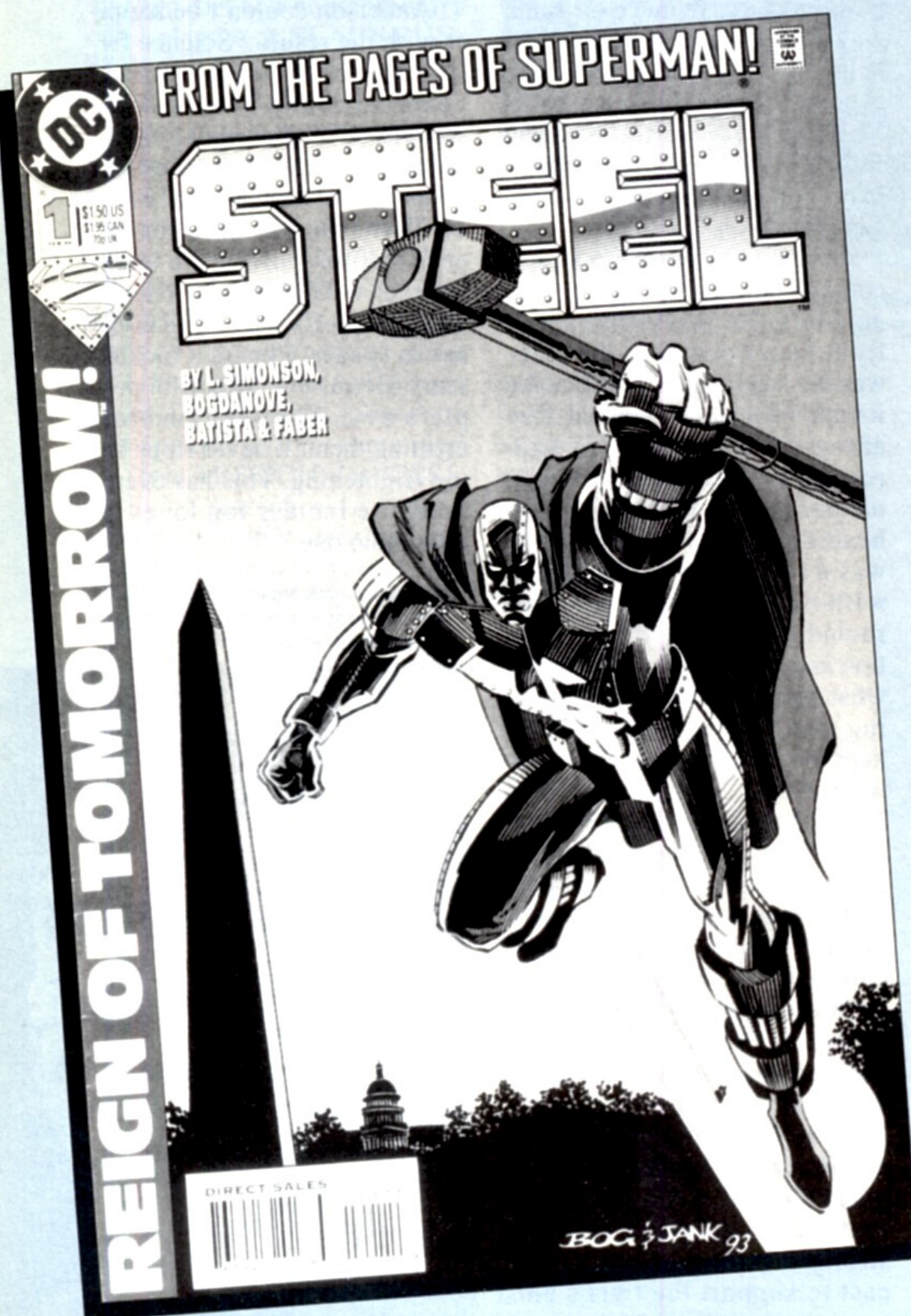
Astronaut Jack Noseworthy suffers the consequences of confronting "the most ancient evil of all."



FILLING SUPERMAN'S SHOES SHAQUILLE O'NEAL IS

STEEL

ALIEN NATION's Kenneth Johnson brings the comic book hero to the big screen.



Steel #1 launched the comic book series of the character, who had originated in the *Superman* comic book series as one of several replacements that stepped forward during the "Death of Superman." The film drops all references to Superman.

Hollywood has tried to turn dozens of comic books into hit motion pictures or TV programs. Though most have met with limited success, the gold mine associated with profitable franchises such as *SUPERMAN* and *BATMAN* keeps Hollywood trying. The latest comic book adaptation to make its way to the big screen is *STEEL*. Based on the DC Comics title of the same name, it is the other, less publicized superhero movie from Warner Brothers this summer. Joel Simon produced the film, which was written and directed by Kenneth Johnson (*V*, *SHORT CIRCUIT 2*). NBA star Shaquille O'Neal (*KAZAAM*) takes the title role of John Henry Irons, a former weapons expert who dons a homemade suit of steel to combat the violent weapons he unwittingly helped create in the military. Richard Roundtree (*SHAFT*) is Uncle Joe, Steel's mentor; Annabeth Gish (*WYATT EARP*) is Sparky, the electronics expert; and Judd Nelson (*St. ELMO'S FIRE*, *SUDDENLY SUSAN*) is Nathaniel Burke, Irons' former colleague who is now selling weapons on the black market. The film opens August 15.

Simon is hoping audiences will perceive this movie as different from other superhero movies of late. "We wanted to

make a PG-13 film that we could take our kids to but still enjoy as adults. It has a lot of heart and a lot of action, but we didn't just throw in the violence or horrific scenes just for the sake of doing it. We were very, very conscious of that. We want to bring in families and kids."

Simon pointed out that adapting a comic book isn't as easy as it may seem. "I think you have to understand comic books to do it," said the producer. "In a lot of cases that is why you don't see more comic books turning into movies. They become silly or unrealistic. Kenny truly has a grasp, based on his body of work, and understands how to bring this to the screen, which he did amazingly. The only thing I can compliment myself on is that I chose Ken Johnson to write and direct. He did everything I could want and more."

Having written, produced and directed CBS-TV's *THE INCREDIBLE HULK*, Johnson is no stranger to successful comic book adaptations. That didn't mean he was automatically going to say yes to *STEEL*, however. "Most people don't realize how difficult it is to translate something from the comic book world into the real world and still be appealing to adults," said Johnson. "The first thing I asked produc-

BY F. COLIN KINGSTON



Shaquille O'Neal is John Henry Irons, aka Steel. Left: Annabeth Gish plays Sparky, who devises the suit to help Irons stop his former colleague (Judd Nelson, right) from selling weapons to street gangs.





Inset: A hero in and out of costume, Irons rescues an innocent victim from the weaponry he helped create—an incident which inspires him to become a superhero. Above: Unlike the comic book, Steel's hammer doubles as a flamethrower.

er Joel Simon was, 'Does he wear a funny costume? Because I can't deal with that.' When I looked at the comic book and realized that I could take the cape off and make his outfit a believable suit of high-tech armor and still keep the characters and bad guys, I decided to take it on."

The film follows John Henry Irons' transformation from a military weapons expert to a disillusioned private citizen, to a superhero who starts his cru-

sade when the very same weapons start showing up in the hands of local street gangs and terrorists. It is an action-adventure with a healthy dose of comedy. Though there is lots of action, there is no graphic violence. It has been replaced with high-tech weaponry that can knock down entire buildings or stun the victims without killing them. This was a conscious choice by Johnson, who was not interested in doing a blood-and-guts type picture. "I turned

down the original ROBOCOP many years ago for the same reason," he said.

Though the film differs from the DC comic book, Simon reports no trouble from the comic book giant. "DC has been wonderful," said the producer. "They liked everything that Ken created very much, even if it was different from the comic book. They thought what he added was wonderful."

Johnson acknowledges differences between the comic book and his screen adaptation. "My original script was set in Washington, D.C. [as is the comic book] because I felt it lent an additional aura of reality to the piece. It is also my hometown, so it would have been fun to film there. Warner Brothers had a difficult time in filming in Washington, D.C., on another picture so I couldn't convince them to do it. I restaged all the action in Los Angeles."



Left: the wheelchair-bound Lt. Spinks is responsible for the design of Steel's high-tech suit of armor. Below: Uncle Joe (Richard Roundtree) is the father-figure/mentor to the disillusioned Irons.



STEEL

SHAQ ATTACK!

The NBA star leaps into big screen superheroics.

Basketball star Shaquille O'Neal had a connection to STEEL even before he was tapped to portray the superhero on screen: the comic book character had been drawn to look like O'Neal. "If you look at the *Steel* comic book closely, it's my likeness," said O'Neal. "I made a little deal with D.C. Comics a long time ago, right before they killed Superman off and brought back a couple different Supermen—I'm Steel. I'm really John Henry Irons." (Steel's creator Jon Bogdanove concurs: "Shaq actually commissioned DC to have me do a drawing for him early on in the creation of *Steel*. We kept getting feedback that Shaq really liked it. This was before he had done any acting at all, and I said, 'Boy, this guy looks great for *Steel*. I wonder if he can act?'"")

A fan of the comic book series, O'Neal actually had a copy of the book with him when he went to meet with producer Quincy Jones to discuss possible new projects. "Quincy wanted to do another project; luckily, I had the STEEL comic book in my bag. So I said, 'Why don't we do this movie?' He loved it, and the people at Warner Brothers loved it because they still have their ties with SUPERMAN, so we did it."

Although based on a D.C. Comics character, Steel is viewed by O'Neal as more realistic than most—"[he's] down to Earth, sort of like a neighborhood type of superhero." The film adapts the comic book fairly faithfully—"except for flying and all that stuff," O'Neal explained. "They really didn't want me to fly, but everything else—the hammer and the motorcycle, stuff like that—is still the same."

The pre-production for STEEL began some months before principal photography, due to the complicated process required to create the form-fitting costume for O'Neal's seven-foot-two-inch frame. "I had to stand for three hours and get plaster on me. It's

hard to stand there with your knees straight and your arms out for an hour straight. You start getting dizzy," O'Neal recalled. The body mold which resulted was used to create the silvery suit of armor which is the trademark of the character in the film. Although the costume has the sheen of steel, it was made out of something quite different, and it wasn't very flexible. "It was made out of Fiberglass stuff," Shaquille revealed. And describing what it was like working in it, he added that the costume was, "very difficult and very hot. It was heavy, but I'm big and strong, and luckily we shot a lot at night time—all but two days of filming was shot at night. During the day is when I shot all the casual stuff, but in the night time I had to come in at 7:00 and didn't leave until 7:00 in the morning. That was when I wore that dang suit."

STEEL was filmed during the Summer of '96 for a Summer '97 release, and all the shooting was done in and around the Los Angeles area. "We filmed downtown. I did all my own stunts. I had to ride a motorcycle with cops chasing me. I only fell once; luckily, I had padding and a suit to protect me." O'Neal did other, more elaborate action scenes as well. "I had to run past a car that was blowing up. I had to jump from one building to another. I had to ride in train yards and let a train fall on me. I got shot a couple times. They had a stunt man, but I just wanted people to see it was me. Jackie Chan's not the only man who does all his own stunts. I haven't broken no bones yet."

Before getting into films, O'Neal's acting experience had been quite limited, but he's proven himself to be a natural in front of the camera. He had done 13 commercials before making his motion picture debut opposite Nick Nolte in the 1994 basketball drama BLUE CHIPS. This was followed up in 1996 by the children's film KAZAAM, in which he played a genie.



Before and after: Irons (Shaquille O'Neal) as he looks in military life (inset) and as Steel (above.)



The films, like STEEL, reflect O'Neal's own taste for kids' movies and movies with action. (He isn't a big genre fan, however: "A little bit—STAR WARS and stuff like that.") Asked what he would like to do in the future, he stated without hesitation, "Children's movies and action films. No love stories. I don't really like dramas and love stories and that stuff, just a lot of action. Believe it or not I like a lot of kids' stories, too, like THE NEVERENDING STORY. I love that, and ALADDIN." There are also certain actors he'd like to work with in the future, "Chris Farley, Jim Carrey, Arnold Schwarzenegger," although there has been no discussion with them about specific projects yet.

Outside of films and professional sports, in April 1995 O'Neal

became the national spokesperson for Reading is Fundamental (RIF), a national organization that teaches millions of people of all ages to read, although O'Neal concentrates his interest on what children read. And even though he's made a movie based on a comic book, he wants kids to aim higher with what they choose to read. "I just encourage kids to read and get their vocabulary up. I don't want them to just read comics all day. Just read. [It's] keeping them out of trouble."

Because of his love of action films, O'Neal is hoping that STEEL is successful enough to lead to sequels. "I think that if this one goes pretty good that hopefully we can do more and go on and on and on."

James Van Hise

(Jon Bogdanove interviewed by F. Colin Kingston)



Above: Steel battles a cyber-enhanced drug lord in *Steel* #2. Below: the film version of Steel's costume omits the red cape reminiscent of Superman.



STEEL

DC COMICS

From Superman spin-off to big screen franchise.

By F. Colin Kingston

Steel, the creation of Louise Simonson and Jon Bogdanove, grew out of their association with the *Superman* comic books published by DC Comics. "Steel was one of the characters created during the 'Death of Superman' story arc I did for the *Man of Steel*," explained Simonson. John Henry Irons was one of four people who stepped forward to try and fill Superman's place in Metropolis."

The basis for *Steel* also goes back to another popular figure in American literature: John Henry, the steel-driving man of the 1800s. The legend, which Bogdanove says is based on historic fact, struck a chord with him. "I used to think that John Henry would make a good superhero. When we came up with the idea of a substitute for Superman who was just an average guy, I thought, 'Hey, here is the place to use this.'"

Said Simonson, "We wanted to create a flawed hero whose heart was very much in the right place. He is a guy who truly tries to do his best with the talents he has been given. It was a natural transition from John Henry the steel-driving man to John Henry Irons."

Explained Bogdanove, "We figured if he was going to have to fight in a league comparable with Superman, he'd better be more than just a seven-foot black guy with a hammer. We came up with the back story of him having worked for the military as a weapons developer. That scientific background became the basis for his ability to make the costume and hammer, as well as his motivation." Steel also shares a problem with another famous person. "He is like

Nobel who invented TNT," says Simonson. "Both men created something they didn't intend to create."

In the real world, when Nobel realized his creation was being used for destruction, he put his energies towards creating the famous Nobel prizes. In the world of the comic book, Steel fights to keep the very weapons he helped create in the military from ending up on the street and being used by criminals. "Steel is horrified that his weapons are being used to blow people away. In a way he has to go around and try to put the genie back into the bottle," explained Simonson.

At the time of its creation, there were no plans to give Steel his own comic book. The character proved a favorite of the fans, however, and a monthly version of *Steel* was soon on its way. Editor Mike Macavee sees two reasons for the character's popularity. "Steel is a man who goes beyond his limitations, a man who becomes a hero out of those efforts. He is not just some iron man Superman type of guy. He is also not the token black hero."

Noted Bogdanove, "When *Steel* came around I was feeling very ambitious. I originally volunteered to write the book. I managed to write the first issue and co-plotted the next two before I realized that I could not both write and draw, at least not at that point. I turned over the writing of the book to Louise." She ended up writing the next 35 issues.

As is common with Hollywood adaptations, neither artist was consulted for the film. "We had zero input. That is just the way things go," said Bogdanove. Simonson is equally re-

signed to the Hollywood inevitable. "I believe it was already being shot when I was told they were making a movie out of it."

Despite their lack of input on the film, both are pleased with what they have seen so far. Explained Simonson, "I've read the screenplay, and I think Kenneth Johnson did a real nice job." Bogdanove, too, is "very impressed," he said.

As is customary with Hollywood adaptations of existing creations, the filmed version of STEEL differs from the comic book. "The concept of the character in the movie is still the same, but how he is designed and his family background are very different," noted Macavee. "In our book John Henry Irons is a gifted man who knows how to create the armor, but he doesn't do it out of junk yard materials. He has the resources to create the stuff where he works. The main link between the comic book and the movie is the similarity between the man behind the armor, and the inner strength he finds to do what he has to do to set things right in his world."

Bogdanove added, "For business reasons beyond the context of the story, they've taken out references to Superman. Some of the other changes that have been made between the comic strip and the movie are sort of demanded by the context of the story."

Noted Simonson, "In our version, Steel can fly." (In the film, Steel rides a souped-up motorcycle.) "They have given him a lot of other technical abilities and some pretty cool supporting characters."

Both agree that the essence of their creation is still very much around. "I think what is most important is that they kept Steel's motivation and his personal character," Simonson explained. "He is really a noble guy. He moves from concern for his family to concern for the larger world. The world actually becomes his family."

Though fans of *Steel* may be upset with some of the changes, they "should remember that it doesn't fundamentally change the character," Bogdanove said. "The only substantial change

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ADAPTABLE STEEL

"Most people don't realize how difficult it is to translate something from the comic book world into the real world," said Johnson, "and still have it appeal to adults."



Writer-director Kenneth Johnson sets up a shot on location in Los Angeles.

As is the trademark of a Kenneth Johnson production, the action-adventure aspects go hand-in-hand with personal development of the characters. At the beginning of the film, Irons is a metallurgist dedicated to developing more humane military technology. Working with Irons is Lt. Sparks (Gish) and Nathaniel Burke (Nelson). When Burke realizes the tremendous offensive capability of these weapons, he sabotages their testing demonstration. This causes a catastrophic accident that leaves Sparks paraplegic. Disillusioned by the offensive use of the technology he helped develop, Irons resigns from the military and returns home to L.A., where he is welcomed by his family, including Uncle Joe (Roundtree), a sculptor who runs a junk yard. He becomes Irons' mentor, "sort of the Yoda of the film," according to Johnson.

Soon after returning home, Irons encounters a robbery by a local street gang. He is astonished to realize that the gang is using some of the same military weapons he helped develop. When he discovers Burke is arming common criminals and terrorists with these weapons, Irons commits himself to stop-

ping Burke.

"Uncle Joe kind of nurtures and covertly convinces Irons to do things the way he wants them done," said Roundtree. "Uncle Joe talks about the Nobel peace prize and how it came about: [Alfred] Nobel invented something he felt was wonderful [TNT], but, to his dismay, it was used to kill a lot of people; that is how the prize came about. Irons puts two and two together and finally gets what the old man is saying; a light goes on over his head." With the help of Uncle Joe and Sparks (a.k.a. "Sparky"), Irons is soon transformed into Steel.

Johnson had fun with the premise. "Instead of working out of some dazzling expensive Batcave like Bruce Wayne, our guy is sort of a blue-collar Batman who works out of Uncle Joe's junk yard," said the writer-director. "He has to piece things together as best he can, and it doesn't always work out great. Sometimes parts of his suit fall off. Sometimes the wires and things he uses to escape don't always hold his weight and drop him into some rather non-decor surroundings."

Effects compositor Chris Holmes helped realize this low-tech mission headquarters: "Ba-

sically, part of it opens up a la the Bat cave, and the doors close so that Steel can hide. She [Sparky] is sitting in this hide-away watching Steel on various monitors telling him to watch out for bad guys. She is another set of eyes and ears for him," said Holmes, whose crew was responsible for the live-action images on the monitors so that "Sparky wasn't looking at a blank screen."

Sparky is also the genius behind the special suit worn by Steel. To create the film version of the suit, O'Neal was covered in plaster for a body mold which was then used as the model for creating the silvery suit of armor that transforms Irons into Steel. Johnson was pleased with the result: "It absolutely looks like homemade steel. It is cool."

Pre-production started while Johnson was filming back-to-back TV movies of his successful ALIEN NATION series for Fox. He did his pre-production work between setups on ALIEN NATION and on weekends. Once the two telefilms were completed, Johnson had just under five weeks to complete pre-production on STEEL. Time was critical as O'Neal had to finish filming in time to start his first season as a member of the Los Angeles Lakers.

Johnson and his storyboard artist worked with a video camera, miniatures, and GI Joes to complete the storyboards. Johnson set up the miniature scenes on his dining room table and filmed them from various angles with the video camera. The storyboards were drawn from the video.

Johnson's careful planning in pre-production helped make the extensive special effects, under the supervision of Bruce Minkus, possible. "Bruce had quite a few challenges facing him," said the director, "in terms of flipping police cars and turning over boxcars that were hit with the sonic sound waves. Everything looks very, very real. That is the key thing about all the special effects in this picture."

"The shots were carefully planned at the storyboard stage and then discussed on the set so

that we could make it as easy as possible for the computer graphics artists to do their work," Johnson added. "There are some 230 visual effects shots in this picture, and every one of them is like swimming through molasses. You literally have to work frame by frame. As an example, we had to make sure that the smoke that we were adding on the computer was responding to the air currents the same way that it would, had it actually been done on the set when we shot it. It is a very tedious, tricky process, but it is all done and it is pretty cool."

The filmmaker wasn't the only one working hard during the pre-production of *STEEL*. So was Shaquille O'Neal. The basketball star-turned-actor began working on the film during the summer Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia. Johnson said, "A fellow director friend of mine, Ben Martin, went to the Olympics and worked with Shaq between games. Ben was a tremendous help in getting Shaq's performance up to the first-rate quality that we ended up with. I think people who are fans of the comic book will be pleased with his performance."

If there was a problem with Shaquille's acting, you couldn't tell it by talking to his co-stars. "Shaquille is a quick learner," said Richard Roundtree. "He soaks things up just by sitting there. It is amazing to watch. You might think that somebody being paid that amount of money to do

Judd Nelson's Burke, the villain responsible for misusing Irons' technology, is about to face a reckoning for his evil ways.



NOBEL PEACE PRIZE

"Steel is like Nobel, who invented TNT," said co-creator Louis Simonson. "Horried that his creation is used to blow people away, he tries to put the genie back in the bottle."



Irons (O'Neal) prepares to give a demonstration of a new, more humane form of military weapons technology. Sabotage sends the demonstration awry.

something in the athletic world would have an attitude, but this kid is really nice. It was a nice experience working with him...[although] it is very disconcerting to have someone that big call you 'Mr. Roundtree.'"

Annabeth Gish added, "Shaq was very collaborative. If he didn't understand something, he wasn't afraid to ask about it. He knows his forte is on the basketball court, but he has a desire and ambition for being on screen, too. I think he has a talent for it, also."

Johnson had 51 days of principal photography, 32 of which were night shoots. "I felt it would help the believability of the film if we didn't have a seven foot guy in a steel suit walking around during the day," he said. "It makes it more mysterious and a little sexier too. In spite of the long, dark hours that it caused, it was worthwhile."

Despite the preponderance of night shooting, the hot summer weather was still a problem, according to Simon. "We were in Valencia, and for four days the weather was well over 110 degrees," explained the producer. "In fact, the movie set next to us closed down for the day. Unfortunately, we didn't have the money to close down and we

were under time constraints. We shot through it. Those days are wearing because you've got to be careful of people's health."

The pressure was on Simon to complete O'Neal's portion of the film in time for him to start the basketball season with his new team. "We had a grueling shooting schedule, with 30 nights out of 50-plus days," said the producer. "You have to change your whole life with that schedule. Fortunately, we had an incredible cast and crew. They did an unbelievable job."

During production, Johnson saw the human side of the basketball superstar. "He is a very friendly, charming guy and is definitely a magnet for kids," said the director. "Kids would come up to him constantly, and he would always have time to greet them. Sometimes when we were filming he would go to various schools that were nearby, and take gifts and talk to the kids about staying off drugs and about being good kids. This was without cameras or public relations people following him to make an event out of it."

While Shaq supplied touching moments off camera, one potentially touching on-camera moment was rejected by Warner Brothers, involving Christopher

Reeve, the last person to play the original Man of Steel in motion pictures. Although the comic book *Steel* is a spin-off from *Superman*, the film version drops the plot connection and pays homage in a more subtle way. "Shaq has the Superman shield tattooed on his left arm and the words, 'Man of Steel' as well. There is a big close-up of it at one point that helps to make the point," said Johnson, adding, "There had originally been a scene in which Shaq went to the VA Hospital to make contact with his former partner Sparky, who had been left a paraplegic as the result of an accident at the beginning of the film," explained Johnson. "Shaq asked a liaison officer in the hospital how he should talk to Sparky, because he was worried about being politically correct. The liaison officer was going to be played by Christopher Reeve, who advised him to talk to Sparky just as he would talk to anybody else. As Shaq started to leave, Chris Reeve would have noticed the tattoo of the Superman shield on his arm. He was supposed to make a comment that it was a very powerful symbol and that anyone who wore it bore a great responsibility. In a very simple yet elegant way, the torch would have been passed." According to Johnson, "Warner Brothers officials ultimately decided that seeing the real Chris Reeve there would pull people out of the film. The scene never got filmed."

Many action-adventure scenes did get filmed, however. One of the most dramatic involved O'Neal standing under a helicopter suspended 30 feet above him. "The studio kept telling me I'd never be able to afford to do it," Johnson recalled. "It involved a helicopter being hit by one of those pulse rifles. It falls down toward a police officer who is sort of frozen underneath it. Shaq runs in and pushes him out of the way just before the helicopter smashes to the ground."

Thanks to some helicopter footage shot for an episode of *ALIEN NATION* and the use of some miniatures, Johnson was able to pull it off. The helicopter suspended above O'Neal

was quite real, however. Said Johnson, "He insisted on doing it himself. I had Shaq standing underneath this burning helicopter 30 feet above him. As soon as Shaq started to move we cut the cable on the helicopter, and he was out from under it by the time it smashed behind him. I'm pleased to say that nobody was hurt in the course of the whole picture."

According to Johnson, the most difficult scene was a chase in a railroad yard at night that features many railroad cars simultaneously switching tracks. "The sequence is very heart pounding," he said. "Filming it was the same way because we had Shaq and other people, including the crew, running across railroad tracks between moving railroad cars that each weighed 80 or 90 tons. Once they started rolling, the cars didn't stop until they hit something."

The sequence features flipping boxcars and several near misses. "The boy Shaq is chasing," said Johnson, "almost gets run over by a moving freight train, which Shaq has to jump on, cross over, and jump off on the other side. It was all split-second timing with huge machinery and incredibly difficult logistics. Shaq did it himself."

Visual effects compositor Chris Holmes, of the Post Group, is one of many effects wizards charged with making such heroic moments look believable. He, Marty Rosenstock, and four "painters" spent eight weeks during post-production working on "about 40 shots," said Holmes. "Our facility spent hours painting stuff. Other facilities did even more."

The painting Holmes refers to involves using computer animation to digitally "paint" out things which might give away some of the secrets of STEEL's special effects. It is the filmmaking equivalent of air brushing photos. Even scenes which may not seem loaded with opticals contain moments which, if not done correctly, make the hero look anything but super. For example, Holmes pointed out, "In the film, Steel falls off the building and hangs on to the side. You don't want to see the safety wires that are holding Shaquille O'Neal or the stunt double. We recomposit the en-

STEEL

SUPERHERO SIDEKICKS

Richard Roundtree & Annabeth Gish

Almost everyone, even a superhero, needs a mentor and/or sidekick. Steel has both: Uncle Joe, played by Richard Roundtree (SHAFT); and Lt Sparks, played by Annabeth Gish.

"Uncle Joe is the old sage," said Roundtree, "kind of a father-figure" who helps John Henry Irons decide what he must do once the weapons Irons designed in the military start turning up on the street.

Most of Roundtree's scenes are with Steel and Lt. Sparks, much of it within the modern-day mission-control center hidden in the junk yard operated by Uncle Joe in downtown Los Angeles. In the beginning of the film, Sparks is the victim of a weapons testing accident which leaves her paralyzed. Her predicament leads to one of the many scenes of which Roundtree is genuinely proud. "The nice part of it is how we coerce Sparks into getting off of her position of being an invalid. Sparks is kind of feeling sorry for herself as a result of the accident. Steel and I get her to come around and to start fighting back. She really involves herself in the whole thing, and it brings her character out."

Recalling a light moment during filming, Roundtree said with a chuckle, "One day Annabeth and I were talking in between shots. I said something about a film I did in 1971. She said, 'That is the year I was born.' I've got shoes older than that!"

Annabeth Gish was suitably impressed: "Talk about legends! I had Shaq and Shaft. Richard Roundtree is a great guy. He was very calming to be around and to work with."

Although physically disabled, Gish's character is not confined to just being the brains of the operation. "Sparky is kind of a bad ass in a wheelchair," she said. "I become very cool at the end of the film. I design weapons to attach to my wheelchair and get to



Uncle Joe (Richard Roundtree) and Sparky (Annabeth Gish) are, respectively, the heart and brains behind John Henry Irons' transformation into Steel.

save us and blow stuff up. The scene where I fire my laser is really fun.

The part offered some physical challenges. "Trying to maneuver the wheelchair around the set wasn't easy," said Gish. "I had to be very careful about Shaquille's toes. One time, I came close to them, and Shaq said to me, 'I'm going to have the owner of the Lakers call you!' I could just see the headline: 'Annabeth Gish sued for running over Shaquille O'Neal's toes.'"

Roundtree had a small amount of input on the development of his character. "I did the character pretty much as it was written. There is obviously always something that doesn't flow from your mouth exactly the way the writer put it on paper. Ken is the kind of director who you can talk to and make it fit your concept of the character. He is a joy to work with. He is so easy-going. There is never any stress on the set. He is one of the nicest people I've had the opportunity to work with, that is for for sure."

Having worked on such films as AMITYVILLE: A NEW GENERATION, EARTHQUAKE, and

Q, Roundtree is no stranger to fantasy or science fiction films. Despite this, he noted, "I am not a big sci-fi fan by any stretch of the imagination. I'm a little more reality based," he added, with his trademark dignified laugh.

Roundtree has had a long career in the film industry. Despite the many films he has done, one role seems to stand out above all others—the Academy-Award winning SHAFT. The movie spawned two sequels and a television series starring Roundtree. It is a role he still can't quite escape. "Sometimes I could go maybe a day and a half without anybody mentioning it," he quipped.

"There was a long period where I was playing different versions of a cop. I can thankfully say I'm not doing many of those roles anymore. I'm leaning a lot more toward character roles now. They have much more color than the ones I've played in the past."

Playing a character role wasn't the only thing that attracted Roundtree to STEEL. "The nice thing about it is that it is an action-adventure film that I can take my kids to."

F. Colin Kingston



Even before he becomes Steel, Irons proves himself capable of superhuman effort when he attempts a rescue following the weapons demo catastrophe.

tire background of the shot, or sometimes just a portion of it, so you don't see the wires. Even though you think there is live action, part of the background can be fake.

"What we did was paint the frame clean," Holmes continued. "Sometimes it was a portion of it, sometimes it was the entire background. This meant going frame by frame in many instances. Painters worked on literally hundreds of images. The most difficult shots were the ones with wire removals."

Holmes also helped Steel's electronic armor perform a few tricks. "His suit has the ability to turn into a gigantic magnet," he explained. "Steel uses it to attract the weapons of the opposing forces. When bad guys are surrounding him with guns and knives, he turns on the suit and everything metallic flies and attaches to the suit. The way they did it was really funny because they also had trash can lids, hubcaps, and that type of stuff. They taped or glued all these items on the suit. Each object also had a wire attached to it. When they pull these wires, all these things fall off." When the film is reversed, it looks as if the metallic items are flying and attaching themselves onto the suit. There is only one problem: all the wires are visible. That is where Holmes and the crew at the Post Group come in. "We had to paint out all those wires that were basically covering the entire background."

Holmes added, "Shaq's whole mouth and chin were covered by wires too. In one

scene we had to put his chin back in and track it back so that there were no wires showing. I painted one portion of his chin clean and then found another portion of it that was clean and reconstructed it. It was digitally manipulated and then put back in place."

The digital manipulation didn't just involve hiding wires. "One shot has the stunt double hanging from the top of a building. The camera rotates above the building from a bird's point of view. When we painted out the safety wires and rigging we also had to rebuild the top of the building, digitally; part of the building is actually fake. That was hard, because as the camera moves you have to make sure that the building moves with it."

Despite moments like this, Johnson wants scenes emphasizing personal stories to stand out as much as the effects. The scene of which he is most proud focuses on personal triumph, not heart-pounding action, when Sparky falls out of her wheelchair. "Although Shaq sees her, he holds Roundtree back from going to help, silently deciding that this is something she has to face on her own," said Johnson. "After crying with self-pity, Sparky steels herself and climbs hand over hand back up into the wheelchair without the use of her paralyzed legs. Annabeth consulted with a woman who is a real paraplegic. She showed Annabeth the process one has to go

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STEEL

VISUAL EFFECTS

FX supervisor Don Baker on crashing 'copters.

The life of a superhero is an exciting one. In addition to catching villains, a superhero saves lives and rescues others from perilous situations. John Henry Irons (a.k.a. Steel) is no exception. One of the most exciting scenes in the upcoming film involves Steel pushing a policeman out of the way of a falling helicopter, which bursts into flames after being shot down by villains using the very same futuristic weaponry that Irons created during his stint in the military.

Scenes like the ones above are easy to do in comic book form. The writer creates the scene, and the artist draws multiple panels showing all the action. In the live-action world of Hollywood, however, scenes like this take hours of planning, much creative effort, and lots of money.

Much of the responsibility for helping to ensure that the exploding helicopter scene came together fell to Don Baker, visual effects supervisor and miniature director of photography on the project. Describing the scene, Baker said, "The helicopter gets shot by this electrical beam of light. It takes a small blow and you know it is in trouble, and it drops to the

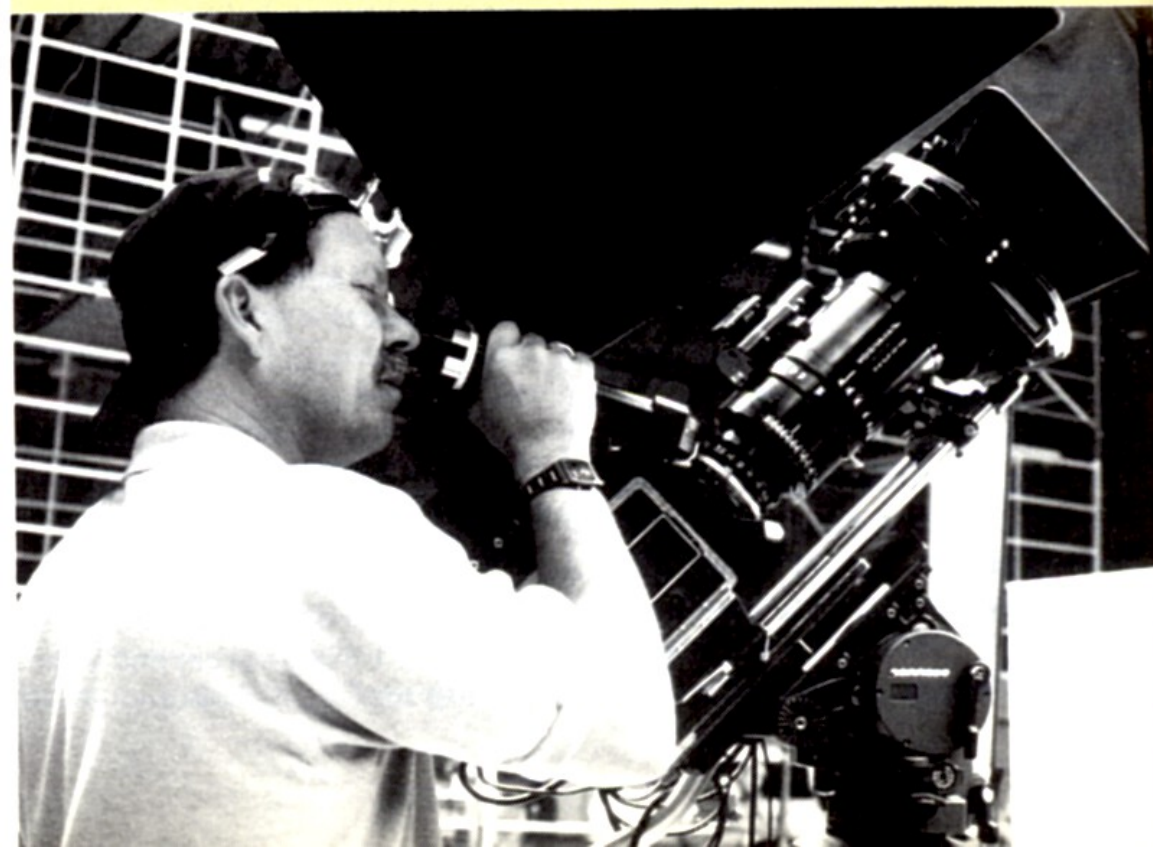
ground." Sounds simple, right?

All total, the scene took approximately two months to plan and execute. Baker explained that the scene was shot differently from the way it was originally envisioned. "At first, it was to be shot as an in-camera effect with no visual compositing involved. Later on it was obvious that, while it was a great idea and would save money, it would never be as satisfying as placing the helicopter within the Los Angeles city environment. Instead of being shot outdoors against a black sky, we decided to shoot it against a green screen so that we would have the ability to matte the helicopter to the city environment."

Production of the scene involved several steps. "We shot the live action background shots for the helicopter in Los Angeles. We basically designed it for two shots of the helicopter. One was a side shot, and the other was a shot where the helicopter would fall right down on top of the camera showing Steel's point of view." The helicopter in question is a Jet Ranger, "the kind used by news crews," according to Baker.

"Because I have extra cameras at my disposal through the Cannon

Effects supervisor Don Baker shoots the live-action element. Both a full-scale shell of a helicopter and a 1/6 scale model were used for the effect.





Steel pushes a hapless policeman out of the path of a plummeting helicopter (above), after it is hit by an electrical beam and explodes (below).

Group, we thought, 'What the hell? We might as well cover it with a few other angles.'" The extra camera angles gave writer-director Kenneth Johnson greater freedom and more choices when editing the final scene together.

Another important aspect of the scene involved the use of a scale model of the Jet Ranger. "It has been my experience that to have a satisfactory event filmed in miniature, it has to be built at least 1/6 to scale. The model was five feet in length and built to have replacement parts which included side panels, engines and the windshield. We designed it for three takes. It was hung through a single guide wire which went through the shaft of the engine prop. We shot the scene against a 60' x 40' green screen."

In addition to the model, filmmakers had the shell of a real helicopter suspended in the air. Said Baker, "The shell was already in flames and you couldn't see anyone inside it. In our miniature helicopter we had two 1/6 scale puppets inside."

Johnson directed the live-action footage of the helicopter shell

suspended in air, and matted it together with the footage of the miniature. It was then combined with the background footage of Los Angeles. The shell was also filmed dropping onto the ground. When everything is combined in post-production, it looks as if the helicopter is shot out of the air and crashes to the ground in flames.

This being a superhero movie, there is drama on the ground where the helicopter is crashing as well. Just as it is about to fall on top of a policeman, Steel rushes in and rescues the officer, pushing him to safety just before the copter crashes and bursts into flames.

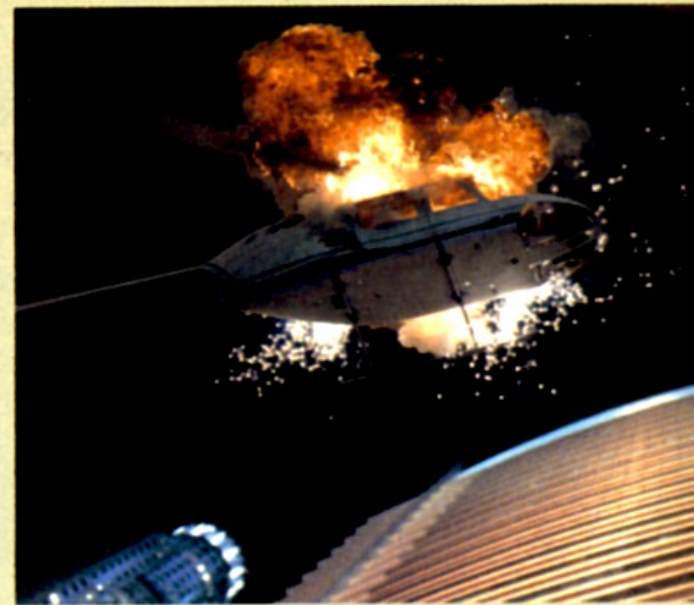
"Watching it filmed was actually pretty humorous. Shaq was in his armour plating, and he had to keep falling on and squashing this poor guy playing the policeman. The policeman's eyes got real big after a while," Baker said with a laugh. "It was the highlight of the night for me."

Like any good special effects artists, Baker and his crew enjoyed making the helicopter explode and burst into flames. He gives special thanks and credit to pyrotechnician Ian O'Connor. "We used a combi-

nation of Benzanol, which is a flame-like chemical that evaporates very quickly. It works on scale models very well because the flames are gas-like in color. It happens really fast but the high-speed photography of 120 frames per second makes it a much bigger gas discharge and flame."

The extra cameras Baker used in filming the helicopter scenes proved useful to Johnson in post-production. Said Baker, "I haven't seen it yet, but I understand that Ken used four or five cuts with the multiple camera angles of the miniature. It makes the fall and explosion much longer. It means we did our job, and I'm very happy with that."

Baker's schedule was more hectic than usual during the filming of STEEL. The helicopter scenes were done on a weekend. During the week Baker was working on another superhero movie from Warner Brothers: BATMAN AND ROBIN. "I was very interested in STEEL and wanted to do it on the side," he said. Much of the reason Baker wanted to be in-



involved with STEEL had to do with Ken Johnson.

"Ken is a good director," said Baker. "Most of the time the directors don't show up on Saturdays for miniature shoots like this. He was there every step of the way and wanted to be involved. It was great for us because he gave us approvals or changes with the model and within the setups. In fact, he was the one who said, 'We still have a little bit of the model helicopter left. Let's drop it again and blow it up some more.'"

F. Colin Kingston

MIMIC

The helmer of CRONOS on his Hollywood horror debut.

By Sam Becker
& Michael Beeler

This summer, the July 18 release of Miramax's \$22 million production of MIMIC will mark the American feature film debut of Guillermo del Toro. Del Toro sent ripples across the international film industry three years ago with his first feature film CRONOS. That Mexican production, which presented a fresh spin on the somewhat worn-out vampire genre, garnered critical praise worldwide. It won the Grand Prize from Critics Week at the Cannes Film Festival after sweeping the 1993 Ariels (Mexico's equivalent of the Oscars) and found a solid cult following among genre fans here in the States.

MIMIC promises to continue del Toro's inventive film perception, with a creative bent on the science fiction premise of "the aliens are among us!" Only this time, the aliens take the form of genetically altered bugs that evolve into humanoid creatures that initially move unnoticed into the general population only to later wreak havoc.

The evolution of the production in some ways seems to mirror its own storyline. "I found a story called *Mimic*," said del Toro, while having breakfast at Hugo's restaurant

in West Hollywood. "It was a very short story about insects mimicking human beings. And I said, 'Maybe if we take this, expand it, twist it and so forth it can be half an hour.' I originally wrote it as a short film."

The powers that be saw his treatment, loved it, and decided it should be expanded to feature length. Matthew Robbins, John Sayles, and Steven Soderbergh were brought in to flesh-out the script del Toro had begun. Oscar-winner Mira Sorvino and Jeremy Northam (EMMA, THE NET) were enlisted to play the lead roles.

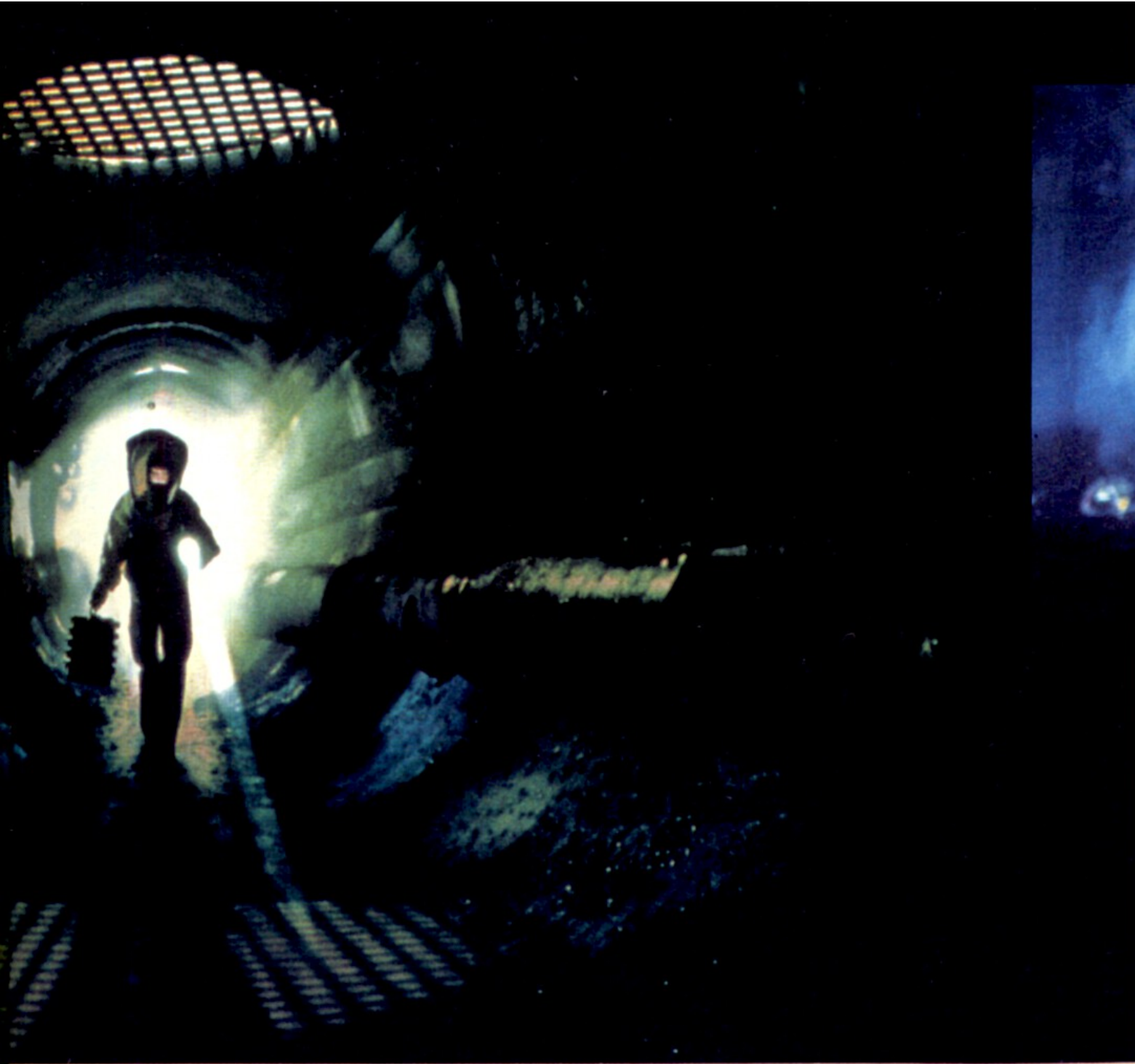
Although del Toro seemed to have no trouble jettisoning his low-key low-peso production mentality for the grander scope that big bucks provide, he was determined to remain true to his roots. "I decided to go for a thrill ride," he continued. "Sort of a fast, classic, scary, science fiction, gothic thriller that would be atmospheric and how do you say, richly textured. So it evolved from that short to what it is now. MIMIC, from the beginning, clearly was a much more mainstream movie and a much more audience-friendly movie than CRONOS. But I still tried to keep some stuff off-kilter, mostly just to make me happy—to keep me interested. And although it is a summer

thriller, I tried to keep elements in it that are more personal."

Del Toro's idea of more personal may be a bit misleading. His take on this movie was always to use it as a vehicle to stir up the fears of what he refers to as "our insulated society." He emphasized, while literally pounding and laughing out loud in the restaurant, "I love it! I took MIMIC with an absolute passion. You know what is funny? I felt liberation—an enormous liberation. The one thing that I love is to take middle class characters and torture them. In CRONOS, I tried to take a guy who was so

Left: Charles Dutton, Giancarlo Giannini, Mira Sorvino, and Jeremy Northam search for the Mimic—a predator that preys on humans by passing for human. Below: Guillermo del Toro directs Sorvino.





While making an investigation of a subway tunnel, Dr. Tyler (Sorvino) finds herself facing a strange and deadly adversary—genetically altered insects that have evolved into humanoid form.

happy with his life and then dipped him in shit, making him lick bathroom floors and making him rot and putrefy. In *MIMIC*, I grabbed these two characters living in a comfortable world who have their lives resolved, and I take them through Hell. I love that! I just enjoy that very much. It's a very perverse Catholic guilt thing. I think you are human only when you experience joy and pain. One of the things that I fear about the '90s and what I fear the most about society is how fucking isolated you are from pain. You can't live like this. You can't go from your air-conditioned car, to your air-conditioned house, fuck your wife on the weekends, and eat at regular hours. It's horrible. It's deadly. So what I love about this thing is they take middle class characters and smear them in shit."

Much of del Toro's passion for this kind of storyline stems from his adoration of Hammer films and old Hollywood monster flicks. "Here we are manipulating genetics with insects," he said. "It's great! 'Oh we're going to put this gene here, this gene there, and make a great hybrid!' Then four years later you wake up, and that hybrid is on top of you. It's like that moment in *Frankenstein*, that peaceful-horror moment when Victor Frankenstein wakes up, after the slumber of creation, and the creature is looking at him. That's the horror. Yes, you created it, but now let me put you in the same room with it. You know, that's the fun of it!"

Listening to del Toro, it is difficult not to get caught up in his enthusiasm. Northam,

speaking on a phone from London during a later interview, could not have agreed more. "I met Guillermo last summer [1996], when I was doing the press tour for *EMMA*, in Los Angeles," said the actor. "I was absolutely charmed by him. I mean, I think he's an obvious enthusiast for life and his work, and that's quite infectious. He's incredibly well read in all kinds of spheres and he's a great cinephile. He's got a wide-ranging taste and

a wide set of references. He's incredibly daring, very single-minded, and, of course, incredibly inventive."

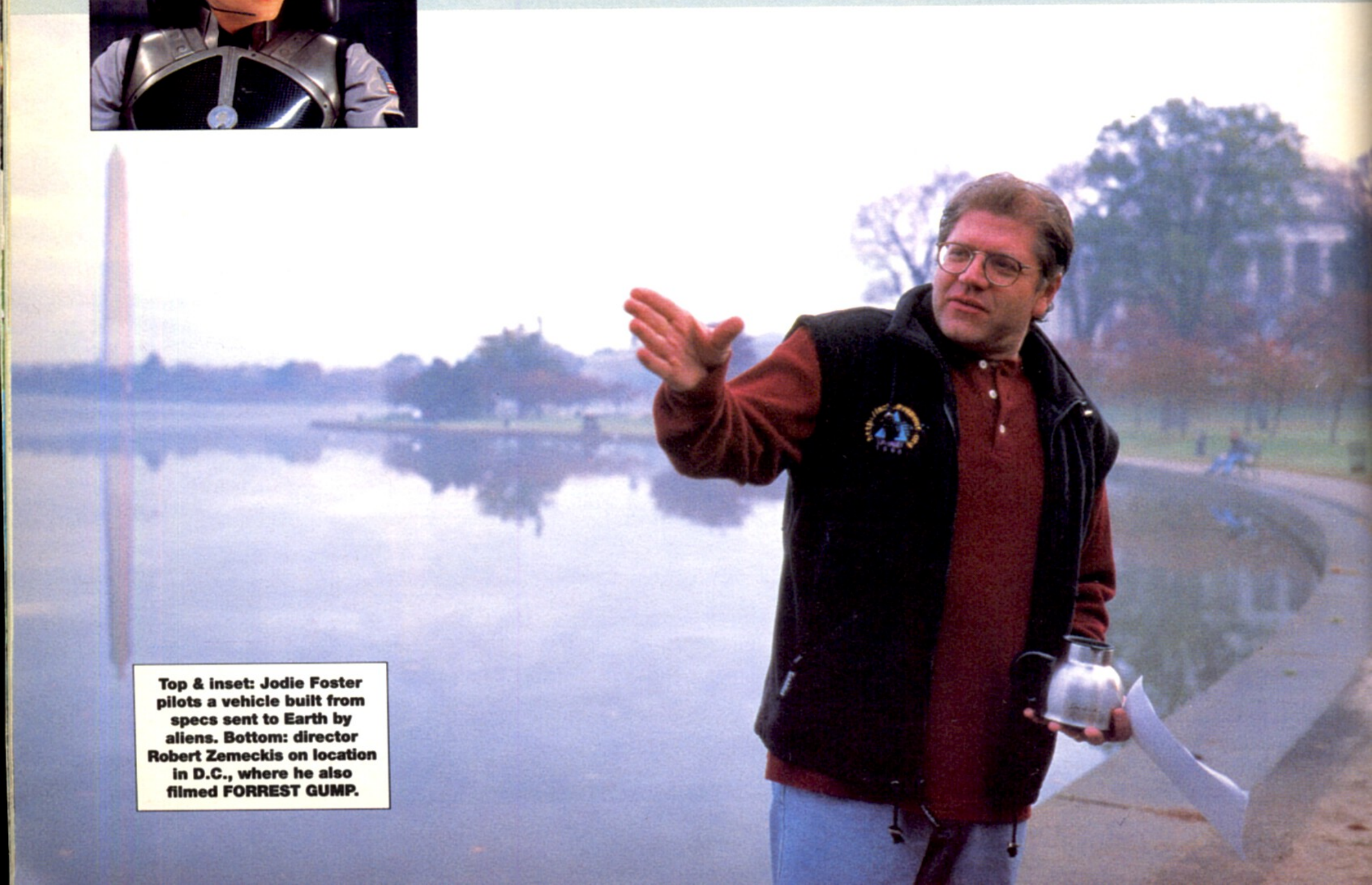
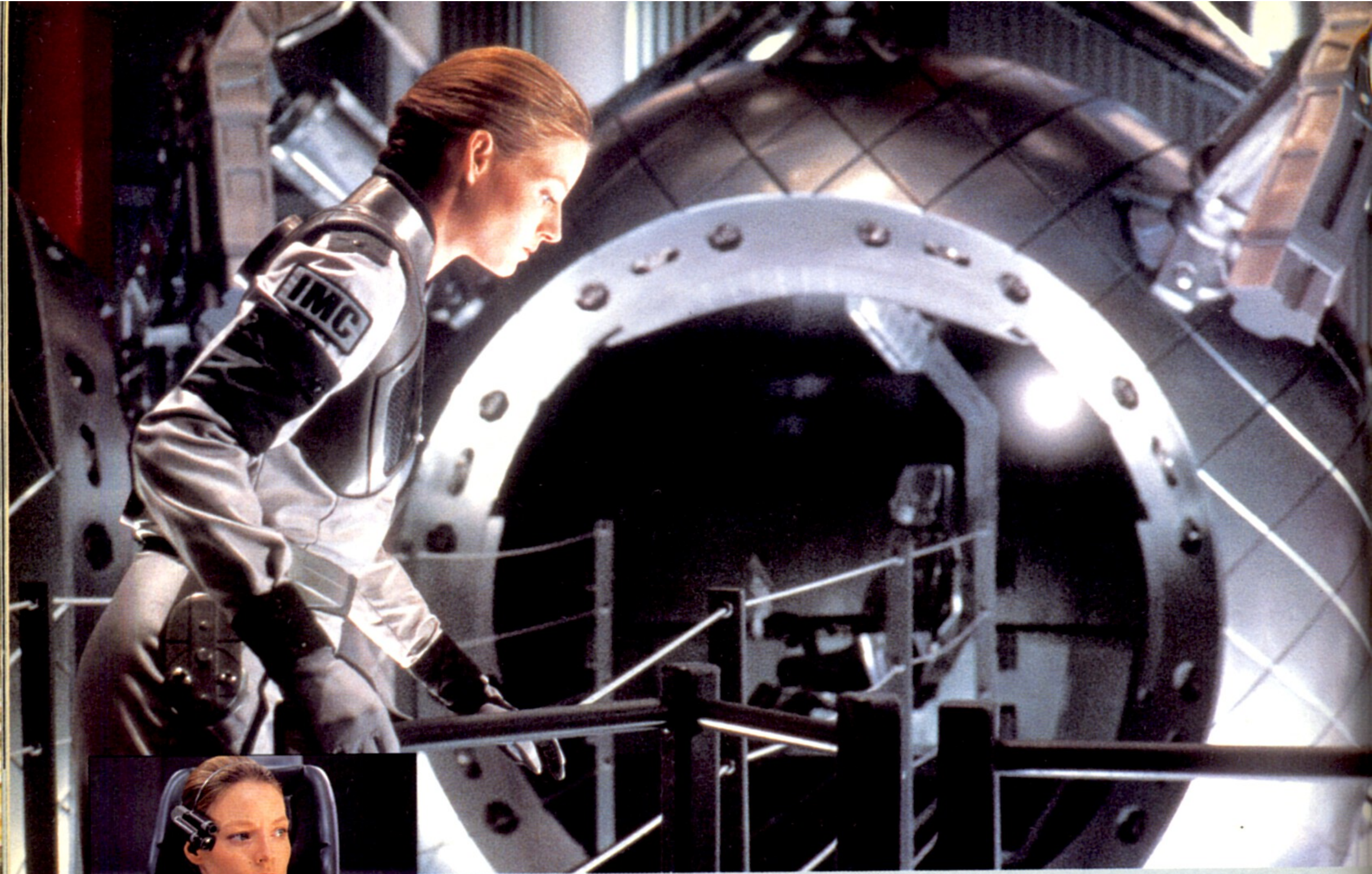
Initially Northam was taken by del Toro's words on paper and then by the quality of his film production. "I was intrigued by how this script was, in one sense, obviously a genre film, but also how it did not conform to many of the stereotypes you see these days," said Northam, who had just finished up a small part in Steven Spielberg's Civil War-inspired production entitled *AMISTAD*. "[*MIMIC*] is a very original kind of movie, in the same way that *CRONOS* was a vampire movie but not a conventional vampire movie."

"The filming of this movie was definitely dark; there was a lot of blue lighting. I was very pleased when I saw some footage. I thought what I saw had that kind of fine

continued on page 62

Dr. Tyler (Sorvino, at right) and her assistant, Remy (Alix Koromzay) make a surprising discovery.





Top & inset: Jodie Foster pilots a vehicle built from specs sent to Earth by aliens. Bottom: director Robert Zemeckis on location in D.C., where he also filmed FORREST GUMP.

CONTACT

The director of BACK TO THE FUTURE brings Carl Sagan's novel to life.

There's an enduring magic to the idea that we are not alone, that there are advanced beings out there who are interested in communicating with us and have something valuable to say. As Jill Tarter, director of Project Phoenix of the SETI Institute, has put it: "They'd probably know a lot about how the Universe works. They've been out there, and they've been talking to other civilizations, and there may be this whole galactic club, the ultimate Internet." **CONTACT** explores some of the social and personal consequences of a search for extraterrestrial intelligence—especially when the search is successful.

The film features an impressive cast of successful mainstream stars who have occasionally dabbled in the genre: Jodie Foster (*SILENCE OF THE LAMBS*), James Woods (*VIDEODROME*), Tom Skerritt (*ALIEN*), Matthew McConaughey (*THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE IV*), and Angela Bassett (*A VAMPIRE IN BROOKLYN*). Director Robert Zemeckis, who most recently won an Oscar for *FORREST GUMP*, returns to the genre he mined with great success in the *BACK TO THE FUTURE* trilogy and *DEATH BECOMES HER*. Michael Goldenberg wrote the script, from the novel by the late Carl Sagan. Warners releases the film July 11.

Since *STAR WARS*, it has been more or less a given that so-called science-fiction films



Left to right: James Woods, Tom Skerritt, and Angela Bassett co-star as officials debating the best course of action in response to the first alien contact, and undermining Dr. Arroway's attempt to put her own plan into action.

are actually more fantasy oriented, transferring myths and legends to the milieu of outer space with little regard for scientific accuracy. Director Robert Zemeckis, however, points out that his new film does not use the premise of alien contact as a mere jumping off point for a typical invasion scenario (*INDEPENDENCE DAY*, *THE ARRIVAL*), nor as some kind of political metaphor (*THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL*)—a fact which he hopes will please fans eager for a more realistic approach. "What drew me to **CONTACT**,"

he said, "and why I think a science fiction fan would like it are probably the same reason: because it's true science speculation. In other words, it's not so fantastic that it's just pure entertainment. It really does go back to the roots of classic science fiction in the works of, say, Jules Verne or H.G. Wells, and it poses the classic 'what if' question: *What if this really could happen?* And we put it in a form of reality that we hope is so real that if you are a science fiction fan, you can't help but come away from this in a serious way thinking, 'My God, what

would we do if this really happened? I mean, this could really happen.' That's why I think it's different from most movies that fall into the sci-fi category—because they're usually so fantastic that they're never based in any real reality. They are wonderful, and they're entertaining on that level, but this transcends your classic science fiction definition."

As co-producer and story contributor, Ann Druyan (pronounced *dre-an*) had been involved with the material, along with her husband, Carl Sagan, for many years. She thinks the subject matter is even more meaningful now: "What I think

by
Douglas Eby

CONTACT

JAMES WOODS

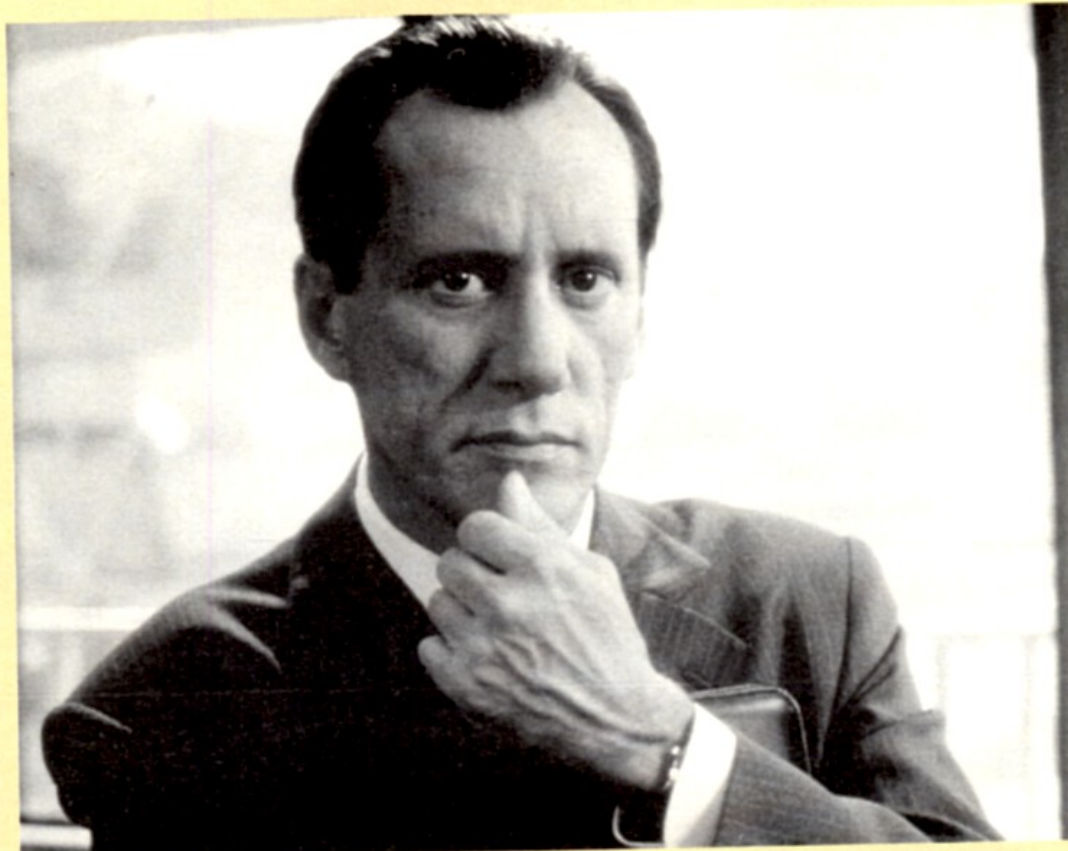
The self-described "exemplar of nerdism" feels right at home with Carl Sagan's speculative science-fiction.

What appealed to James Woods about appearing in *CONTACT* (as National Security Advisor Michael Kitz) "wasn't the character so much as the story itself," said the actor. "I liked the smart version of what would happen if we had prime numbers being broadcast from outer space. To me, it's much more intriguing to have a really true, philosophical, scientific understanding of what that would provoke in people. People have asked me if I'm the villain in the story, and I've said, 'Well, if you've just seen *ET* you'd think I was; if you'd just seen *INDEPENDENCE DAY*, you'd think I was the hero.' I mean, realistically speaking, if you had some kind of communication with what appeared to be a life form from other than this planet, you would want some security precautions, and that was kind of the idea of my character."

Unlike his role of Medgar Evers' assassin in *GHOSTS OF MISSISSIPPI*, security advisor Kitz in *CONTACT* was not based on a real person. Woods said: "He's just an incredibly hard-edged, realistic, pragmatic man. I found it pretty easy to approach. I mean, the things he says are very reasonable. You have to have somebody who puts a little starch into the story. I'd hardly consider him a villain."

Woods stated that part of what drew him to the film was the concept of individuals and society coming to grips with making contact with an alien civilization "and the concept of people dying: you can only imagine it until it happens, and then they're gone forever. The idea of what happens when we finally realize we're not alone now and forever: it gives us a completely different notion of the ego of man and his place in the universe. And the other thing is, what happens when you start preparing for this—all the religious and moral and spiritual, scientific and security implications?"

Responding to whether he'd been interested in SETI, the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence, before doing *CONTACT*, Woods said, "I've always tried to have a scientific perspective; I loathe anything non-scientific. I work in a business where people believe in Scientology and astrology and all this horse shit, you know; however, any reasonable scientist would say



James Woods plays National Security Advisor Michael Kitz, an ambiguous character. "If you just saw *INDEPENDENCE DAY*, you'd think I was the hero."

that the odds are there's got to be other life forms. It's not like carbon is the most unique element in the universe. There are enough stars and galaxies and systems throughout the universe that, just statistically speaking, one would have to imagine there are, if not carbon-based life forms, some kind of life form. But I don't think UFO stories are very reliable, I don't think much about that. I mean, why the fuck would they come all the way over here? It's not like we've done anything too spectacular, except come up with feminism. What have we ever done? Like 'Let's travel 58 light years to talk to those schmucks.'"

He admitted he had never read the Sagan novel, and still hasn't found the time: "I've been too busy working. I'm kind of looking forward to it after all this Oscar period is over," said Woods, who was nominated for *GHOSTS OF MISSISSIPPI*, "but I've just done four movies in a row. As soon as all this is over, I'd kind of like to take a couple of weeks in Hawaii, just sit down, and read and relax. I went to MIT, so I'm kind of an old science buff to begin with. I started in math, then switched over to political science, which isn't a science at all, as far as I'm concerned."

With the level of production that *CONTACT* is, and the capability for sophisticated effects (by Sony Imageworks), Woods commented that "I think people are going to be surprised by the nature of the effects. It's not, you

know, gonna be the biggest monsters made and the biggest starships; it's nothing to do with that. It's more the subjective sense of what would happen—I don't want to ruin it for you—but there's some wonderful things in there, that are pretty moving. A lot of it's all by implication. Zemeckis is such an extraordinary filmmaker, and you get a real sense of the size of this story. When you're shooting out at the VLA [Very Large Array], it's so big out there [in New Mexico], it's astounding."

One of Woods' interests is science fiction literature, and he collects first editions: "I have the prelude to *Foundation*, for example, signed by Asimov just before he died, so it's kind of a nice collector's item. I'm not a big science fiction devotee, but I certainly have enjoyed it from time to time. I'm the biggest *BLADE RUN-*

NER fan in history—I just love that, and I enjoyed [the source novel by Philip K. Dick] *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*"

When asked about being in any genre films other than *CAT'S EYE* and *VIDEODROME*, Woods pointed out, "*Cinefantastique* actually did a whole thing on me when I did *VIDEODROME*," and broke off the conversation to go get his *CFQ*, Volume 13, Number 4 (1983) that he has saved. In that piece he reacts to the ordeal of having to remain motionless more than four hours for prosthetic makeup to be applied: "I will never have anything glued on my body again." He commented about director Cronenberg: "David has remained a friend, and in fact we're talking about a new thing he's doing, that I may get into; I'm not sure yet, but we just talked again last night actually."

Amplifying a statement he made on a recent late night talk show that he is an "exemplar of nerdism," Woods explained, "I've always liked nerds. I was just looking at some MIT T-shirts I have with Smoots stuff on them: they measured the length of the Massachusetts Ave. Bridge with his head, a undergraduate named Smoots, and it was 364 Smoots and one ear or something."

"What I'm seeing of the film is phenomenal," he concluded. "It was such a smart set: Jodie went to Yale; I went to MIT; Bob is smart as a whip, knows everything. It was just really a good experience."

Douglas Eby

is very exciting is, in the kind of long and winding road that has led us to an actual movie, that tension between religion and science, and that yearning for some kind of world view or philosophy that will be informed by the discoveries, is more immediate now, worldwide, than I think it was seventeen years ago when we began this process. And it will also have a kind of goose bump-raising, spiritual dimension to it."

Druyan served as creative director of the NASA Voyager Interstellar Record Project, the complex message of music, text, and images for possible communication with an alien civilization, and she and Sagan collaborated on the Emmy and Peabody Award-winning 13-part TV series COSMOS, a project she recalls "was no small undertaking, especially for its time. It was 40 locations around the Earth, and we did a fair amount of space travel in that as well, so it feels to me that CONTACT is close to that in ambition. And people working on it have the sense that this has the potential to become an event, and to affect the way we think about things."

Sagan's novel revolves around the passionate enchantment of talented radio astronomer Ellie Arroway (Jodie Foster) with the possibility of finding an alien civilization. The story illustrates her early affinity for science when she fixes a broken radio by herself as a young girl, and goes on to figure out the basic electronics involved. Jena Malone, who plays

DIRECTOR ROBERT ZEMECKIS

"It's true science speculation...it's not so fantastic that it's just pure entertainment. We put it in a form so that you come away thinking 'What if this really happened?'"



SETI scientist Dr. Ellie Arroway (Jodie Foster) hears a signal of extraterrestrial origin—the first communication between Earth and an alien civilization.

Ellie from about age 9 to 11, hadn't read the book before being cast, but she was interested in the subject: "There've been lots of movies about alien contact, but this has really a good story behind it. It's not just about the aliens and making the contact; it's more about life. It's real, much more in depth." Although calling the film "a very action-oriented thriller," Malone pointed out, "The script was wonderful and the story was so different from other ones I was

considering. Usually, characters are just there; here, there's different sides to them—it's really [about] the person feeling all these feelings. To be able to express it and have this great love of science was fun to do. I've had a different range of characters, but none of them have really been able to put all their energy into something else, and I've never had to learn about something specific for a character. For this part, I studied up on ham radio, and really got to learn it."

That expertise came in handy for the early scene illustrating the genesis of Ellie's interests: "It opened on me calling on a ham radio, and I'd been calling for hours with nothing happening," Malone explained. "Then all of a sudden I get a person talking back, and I was really excited, and looked on a map [to see] how far away they were from my house. And I asked my dad if we could hear all the way to the moon. I was really interested in that. My mother had died, and I ask if we could talk to her, and my dad says he doesn't think even the biggest radio could reach that far. I think that's one

of Ellie's drives in her life: trying to find and reach her mother, and father [who died later]."

The story development for CONTACT was "a thoroughly pleasurable, stimulating experience from the beginning," said Druyan. "What was so nice about Michael [Goldenberg] and Bob [Zemeckis] and Steve [Starkey] was that, just like in science, the best argument always seemed to win the day. No arguments from authority, from 'Because I say so.' So as we would explore these questions, it was a very thrilling kind of activity. We had gone about the Voyager Record, which has a shelf life of a billion years, with a sense of sacred purpose, a little bit like constructing the 'Noah's Ark' of human civilization, because anything we put on the record had a shot at surviving longer than the shape of the continents, or the contents of our DNA. So that was a profound experience, and everything that Carl ever did in his whole life, as far as I can see, was with the biggest possible context, and the kind of a perspective that was informed by the time scale that he dealt with as a scientist."

Michael Goldenberg, an accomplished playwright with a degree in drama from Carnegie-Mellon University, wrote and directed BED OF ROSES before taking on the job of writing

The film explores human society's reaction to first contact, including resistance from the religious right.



Foster's Dr. Arroway is surprised to see the alien signal includes one of Earth's first televised images, Hitler's appearance at the 1936 Olympic games.





Production designer Ed Verreaux poses before the set of the Pod, an interstellar vehicle constructed on Earth from designs sent by the alien intelligence.

CONTACT. He had read the Sagan novel when it first came out, and started doing some drafts for the screenplay in 1993, joining the company full time in 1995. He's been a "hard-core science fiction fan" since he was a kid, recalling he was eleven when STAR WARS came out: "I was reading a lot of science fiction at the time, and saw the commercials on TV, and I didn't go the first month, because I thought it wasn't hip enough, but then my non-science-fiction friends were all saying I had to see it, and I was converted."

Goldenberg remarked that he's been "totally concerned" with the quality and level of detail in CONTACT: "It was a dream project, to be able to tell the story on this level, but also to help make the kind of movie I've always wanted to see as a fan, and not play fast and loose, the way we see so often, but to get the details right. Especially with a story like this, which is totally based on the credibility and authenticity of the world and the science—that's what makes it tick. And when you've got Carl Sagan there, you know the real-world science is going to be impeccable; that was a huge priority with him. He read over at least everything that came out of my computer, and I'd get notes from him periodically, and talk to him on the phone, and his wife. It was great, an incredible resource. We had more fun talking and arguing. He was a hero."

Druyan affirmed that Sagan was able to make contributions to the development of the film

until the very last moments of his life: "And Bob and Michael and Steve went to great lengths to assure that, even traveling to Seattle where Carl was hospitalized for long periods of time. And Jodie Foster, as well. She made a trip to Seattle—which touched us very deeply—and spent long periods talking at length about the significance of these questions, and about what was best for the movie."

One of the ideas in the novel is that the crew of the Machine, the craft built from design specs supplied by the aliens, consisted of five people, carefully chosen to represent humanity. In the film the sole passenger is Ellie—a story decision that Goldenberg recalled "happened pretty early, I guess. It was a prime example of how you winnow a novel down to get a movie, and the sort of distillation process that has to happen. In this case, it worked dramatically as well. Carl was very enthusiastic about it. When the book was written in the early '80s, the five-member crew was sort of a metaphor for the United Nations. But in the post-Cold War era, it didn't have the same resonance, although there's still very much the idea in the movie about the message [from the aliens] functioning as a catalyst for unity and international cooperation. And when you've got Jodie Foster, she's worth four other characters anyway."

An earlier script of Goldenberg's, the first one he sold, is now in development at Universal. Called INTERPRETATION OF DREAMS, it's "a dark psychological fantasy," he said,

WRITER MICHAEL GOLDENBERG

"You can write anything, and you know Bob Zemeckis is going to visualize it brilliantly. It was liberating to come up with anything and know you could get it on screen."

"sort of combining spectacular visuals with a compelling drama. And that's always been my interest, making those things work together. But in a funny way, a lot of that came up with CONTACT as well, and that's something that's been brought out a little more from the book. It was implicit in the book, but when you have Jodie Foster, you can get inside her head. So from the character point of view, we were able to delve a little deeper, and the medium allows that."

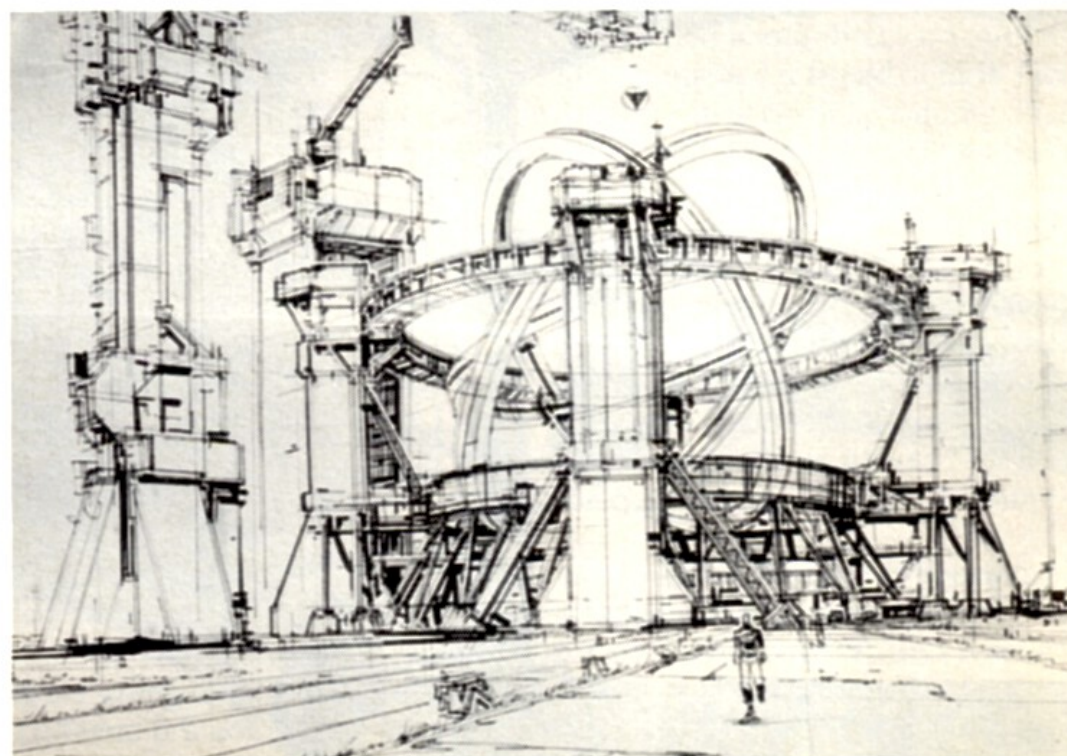
Goldenberg acknowledges the director's influence on the script development: "You can write anything, and you know Bob Zemeckis is going to visualize it brilliantly. It was really liberating to be able to go anywhere, come up with anything, and know you could get that image on the screen. So it was a great ride, that way. And also Carl brings big ideas to the party, stuff you sat up all night in your dorm room talking about. Bob was able to keep it grounded in this reality, and credible, and at the same time, it's juiced up and you're on the edge of your seat."

Zemeckis' ability to keep the speculation grounded in reality

is an outgrowth of his own love for the genre. He said, "I enjoy science fiction that plays by its own rules of altered reality. I also think science fiction is a wonderful way to look at ourselves from a different angle. It allows a storytelling position or angle to look at what's going on in ourselves by injecting a fantastic situation on our everyday life. Time travel's a perfect example. I think the greatest time travel story ever written was *A Christmas Carol*, a story that resonates something that is of our own humanity and our own emotion. Science fiction, in terms of simply creating bizarre creatures, landscapes, universes that have nothing to do with anything on Earth, bores me to tears. It's just like abstract painting, which is legitimate, but it's not really storytelling that I can identify with. So I'm kind of a tough critic on a lot of science fiction as well."

The radio transmission from the Vega system that is at the core of the story carries coded messages in several layers of meaning, including one that turns out to be a replay of one of the first com-

This pre-production artwork shows an intermediate stage of the structure surrounding the Pod, as it will appear when under construction in the film.



CONTACT

PRODUCTION DESIGN

Ed Verreaux on making a realistic representation of a fantastic event.

Production designer Ed Verreaux recalls one "little glitch" on the execution of CONTACT's centerpiece, the spherical "spaceship" set, which he described as "the big, chromium-silver pod." Said Verreaux, "Originally, we had done about two-foot diameter models, and we were trying to find a color and texture that wasn't quite normal. You know when you're running your motorcycle and the fuel is a little too rich, you kind of burn the exhaust pipe to a metallic blue color? We tried that, and Bob really liked it in the model; but then months later, when we had the full size set done, Bob looked at it and said, 'Is that too blue?' So we had to do a quick overnight paint job. Looking now at what he changed it to, I've got to say it looks really good. That was the only real glitch we had, as far as concept to drawing board to ready-to-shoot set."

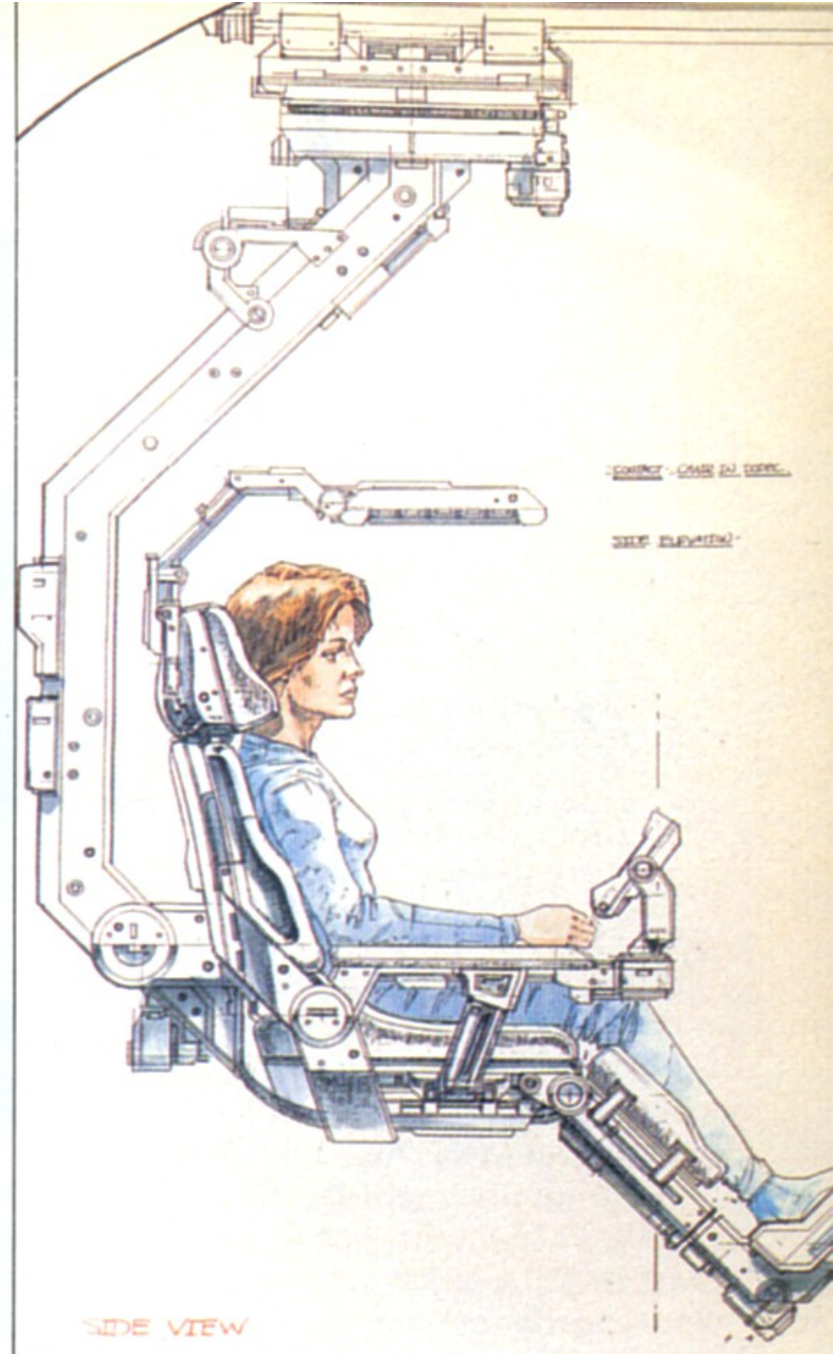
The craft or pod in which radio astronomer Dr. Ellie Arroway (Jodie Foster) is presumably to take flight is described in a somewhat cursory fashion in Sagan's novel: "The geometric design of the Machine was simple. The details were extremely complex... no facilities for eating or sleeping or other bodily functions... Above and below the crew area, in the tapering part of the dodecahedron, were the organics, with their intricate and puzzling architecture." Verreaux says the only thing they really took from the book was the dodecahedron shape that surrounds the spherical pod: "because it was such an interesting form. In early stages we were going for much more traditional, almost cockpit-like designs, or a rocket-sled thing. But Bob had gone to Seattle to visit Carl [Sagan], where Carl was undergoing cancer treatment at the time. Bob took a packet of drawings to show him, and Carl of course had his comments; he really wanted this dodecahedron to be part of the design, because it's one of the primary forms in nature." But, according to Verreaux, it has been Zemeckis who has been in charge of the details: "Bob has very clearly been the captain of this project from the very first day. There's no question he's been the leader."

Part of the design for the Machine is a series of rings which, Verreaux noted, "came from the basic idea of a nucleus of an atom, and the electron rings surrounding it. The idea was these rings are spinning and in some way creating some kind of force field that's opening up a wormhole vortex or something to allow the instantaneous transfer of this pod, or whatever you want to call it, to the other end of the wormhole."

According to the story, the pod vehicle (referred to as the Machine) drops down some distance at the beginning of its journey, and the idea of it being a sphere made sense to Zemeckis and the other designers. "Not that a sphere would work in space, necessarily," noted Verreaux, "but on some subliminal level, you say if you put her [Ellie] in a sphere—that's a planet form; if you give it enough time, everything tends to become spherical. And Bob suggested putting the dodec shape around the sphere. Steve [Burg] did some really elegant drawings that we showed to Bob, and he said to go ahead. From there we began to develop the actual drop chamber, with several months of R&D and drawing, building and refining."

One of the key members of Verreaux's production design team is Steve Burg. Verreaux pointed out: "He worked on a lot of big sci-fi films, like T2, TOTAL RECALL, THE ABYSS, and WATERWORLD. His title is production illustrator, but I would really call him the concept artist; very early in the design

Although basically spherical in shape, Ed Verreaux's design of the pod incorporates a dodecahedron superstructure described in author Carl Sagan's novel.



A production design of the pod's interior, showing the pilot's chair. The vehicle, which promises 2001-type star travels, holds only one occupant.

process I was able to get him to work on the show, and between him and me it was a real collaborative effort. Steve did the big paintings and sketches based on our discussions with Bob. My art directors on the show were Larry Hubbs and Bruce Crone."

The film has meant a lot for Verreaux: "One, this is my first time out as a production designer, so I regard myself as a tremendously lucky person to have been given this assignment. But then also I guess I have to give myself credit for having been prepared and having worked all these years as an art director. As far as I'm concerned, this is the biggest film I've ever worked on, in any capacity, and for most people on the crew I've heard from, this is the biggest thing they've done, and that probably in

the future, this will be regarded by us—certainly by me—as a watermark; on future projects we might say, "Well, this isn't as big as CONTACT," or "This is almost like CONTACT."

Verreaux had coffee mugs made for the crew: "On one side was the CONTACT logo, which was a version of the NASA logo, which we just used for the shoot, not in the movie, and on the other side was a quote from one of the production meetings where Bob had said—and I thought that this really summed up the show—'A truly realistic representation of a fantastic event.' And that's been kind of my guiding line all through the movie."

Douglas Eby

CONTACT

JODIE FOSTER

Finding one's bliss and following one's instincts—all the way to the stars.

By Douglas Eby

According to star and co-producer Jodie Foster, one of the appealing things about her character in *CONTACT* was the intense involvement Dr. Ellie Arroway has with her work. Part of Ellie's journey is an emotionally transforming conversation with an alien-generated simulation of her (now deceased) father—a profound experience described in Carl Sagan's novel: "Whatever happened next, a wound deep within her was being healed."

Foster agrees that this is a crucial scene: "For me, that was the one reason why I was really drawn to this movie over and over again as the years have gone on. That's the one scene that for me is the pivotal mo-

ment in the film. And I knew that that was my obsession. You know, *NELL* basically is the exact same damn story," she said with a laugh. "So, there must be a reason why I'm obsessed by that. It's so interesting: when you think of both films, they're completely opposite; *CONTACT* has nothing to do with *NELL*, and yet, for me, it's the same drive. It's this idea that at a young age, you're abandoned by somebody, and the pain was so intense and so illogical and so unjust and didn't feel right to you, that you made a decision that it didn't happen. So you continue your life, sort of recreating the world in this magical fantasy of saying 'Well, if I could just try harder or listen harder, I'd find him' and 'It was my fault; I did something, and

then he went away.' The greatest moment in your life of healing, I think, and of growing up is the moment when you look off into that pond and you accept the fact that he's gone—and that you've changed, and you're no longer the person you were, and that you're alone. And both of those stories, *NELL* and *CONTACT*, follow that same path."

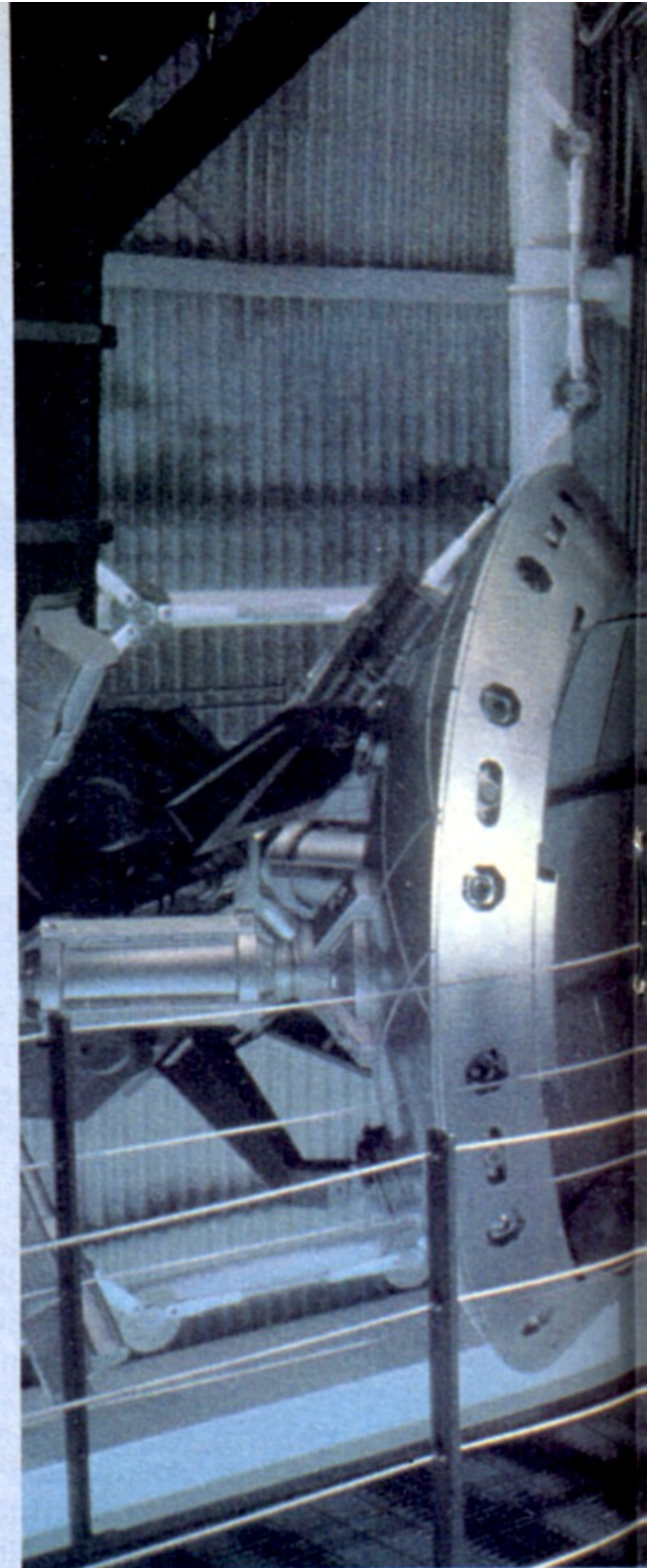
In her 1976 film *THE LITTLE GIRL WHO LIVES DOWN THE LANE*, Foster portrayed a young and gifted girl suddenly on her own after the death of her father, and having to hide that fact in order to be able to inherit his estate. Foster recalled, "It was kind of marketed as a genre, horror movie, but it wasn't. It was actually—you know, I'd forgotten

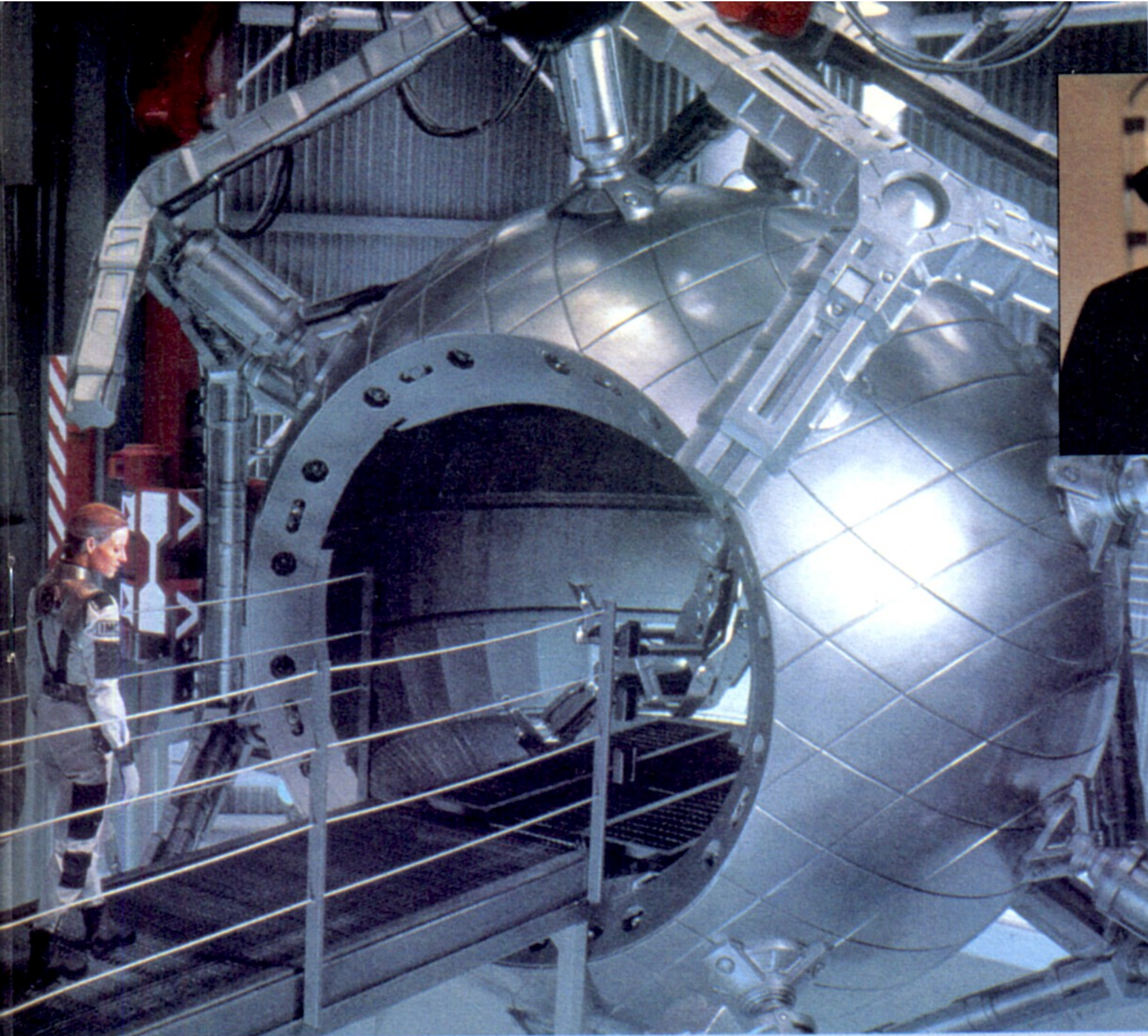
about that movie, and the interesting thing is, it kind of fits in there [with *NELL* and *CONTACT*], too. Her father has died, and the whole town believes he's still alive, and she continues to live in this house as if he was still alive, and anybody who comes to find out the real story, suddenly starts dying."

Foster admits she has never been a big fan of science fiction or fantasy films—"unless there was a real human connection, and then I completely go with it. I mean, *ALTERED STATES* is a movie that I absolutely love...or *THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN*. I love films that were almost medical thrillers. But then again, because they're all about humanity and not so much about 'little green men.' So I think in some ways I have my own particular bend of sci-fi, and that's really the human connection, not so much the opticals and the effects, things blowing up."

Foster said that spending many hours in Seattle with Carl Sagan and his wife Ann Druyan

To portray the journey in the pod, Jodie Foster performs in front of a blue screen.





Uncertain of her destination, Dr. Arrowway (Foster) traverses the catwalk to the entrance of the pod, preparing for a journey that will presumably take her to meet the alien designers of the machine.

during his last days and talking about the development of the movie and the issues it addresses "was my pleasure. And I hoped that she knew that I make movies to try and get better, and not worse, and part of wanting to make this film was to really honor Carl's original vision, and almost be a protector of his original vision. Because it would be very tempting to take a movie like this and make it about NASA and space things."

She didn't know about the Sagan novel until getting involved with the film about three years ago, at a time when George Miller (*THE ROAD WARRIOR*) was attached to direct. Foster recalled, "George Miller gave [the novel] to me. I read it just after I read the screenplay. Our movie is very different from the book, but I really enjoyed the novel because of all of Carl's touches, the fact it brings every different type of science in, too, whether it's biology or genetics or whatever. But if you were really to adapt it faithfully, in terms of all the different characters, it

would be impossible—a twenty-hour movie."

Her character in *CONTACT*, is one for whom Foster had an affinity early on, one she felt she could inhabit thoroughly: "Yeah, absolutely. And mostly for her sort of singular, obsessive passion. That's something that I really wanted to keep and that I know is a big part of my life. I tend to be incredibly singular about what I'm fascinated by, and I can't seem to see anything else. And hers has much more longevity than mine does; usually mine last about four months."

Responding to a comment by fellow actor Tom Skerritt about Ellie and Jodie herself following their strong beliefs—what Joseph Campbell refers to as one's bliss—Foster said that she finds "it's interesting especially for a scientist, because it's not supposed to be about belief, it's supposed to be 'cold, hard fact.' But the greatest scientific discoveries were all made by young people, who were able to say 'Well you know, damn it, two plus two

equals five because why not?' They are at that time in their lives where they want to risk, and they want to believe in something blindly, stupidly. And they don't really know the risks that they're engendering. I think you realize that when you're forty, and you stop making big discoveries, because you start getting safe."

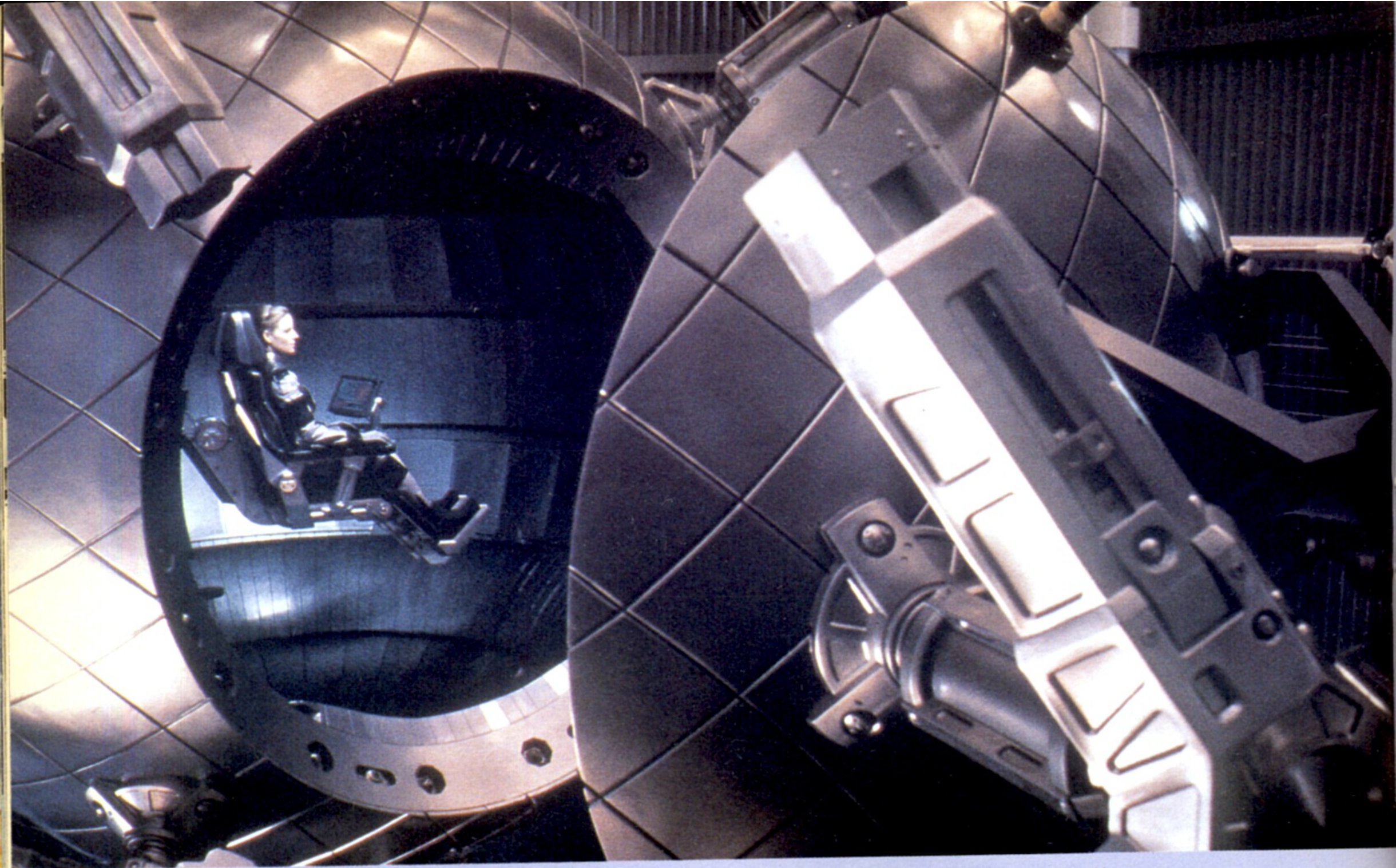
As another perspective on

Ellie, Foster said, "She has this idea—and I can't even explain this, I've tried many times, but it always falls flat like a rock; maybe when I see the movie it will someday make sense—but she has an idea that there's something purer to hold out for. Like if you knew you had to be absolutely alone in order to take this enormous journey to find the most pure love there is, would you say, 'Forget it; I don't want to find a pure love, I'd rather spend my life with somebody'—and committing to humanity, committing to imperfection? Or would you say, 'No, I'm going to hold out for the big stuff'? And I think she's held out for the big stuff. I think there's a side of her that says, 'There's something out there that's larger than this, that I'm meant for, and I'm not going to waste my time settling for less.'"

The central character of Ellie is a woman who has accom-

Matthew McConaughey (of *TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE IV* before gaining stardom in *A TIME TO KILL*) plays the romantic lead opposite Foster.





Dr. Arroway takes her seat inside the pod and prepares for takeoff, on a journey that will lead to distant star Vega.

plished a great deal in her life, and Foster noted, "Traditionally, women who excel have had to place themselves carefully, because the journey is so fraught with disrespect, not being allowed in, all the lack of acceptance, and old traditional wounds, but it doesn't have to be that way. *LITTLE MAN TATE* is kind of about that, too: there are two women; one in some ways represents the head; one represents the heart. And unfortunately in our culture, women have had to choose between the two; they weren't allowed to be both, allowed to be whole, in some ways. So that little boy [in *TATE*] represents a kind of repairing of that split between the two of them, because he gets the chance to be something they were never able to be. I'm hoping, of course, that all that has changed now," Foster said, laughing.

In *CONTACT*, Foster noted, one of the things that gets Ellie in trouble and makes her choice as the astronaut to represent humanity a controversial one, is that she's completely true to herself. She added, "It also

means she's blunt and annoying, and she's not political; she doesn't know when to say the right thing, because she won't disguise the truth. And she's not interested in telling somebody something they want to hear. In some ways the fact that she's kind of continually, almost aggressively, against the system means she's not an easy person to help. In terms of Drumlin [Ellie's former mentor] being

the guy who's kind of accepted politics in some ways, he is a natural choice. I mean, I'd choose him as an astronaut, in a second. He knows how to talk to the press; he doesn't act as if he has a mission that is so clear to him in his head that he can't budge from it; he's easier to have dinner with. He may be the best candidate for America, but he's not necessarily the best candidate for the universe, be-

cause he's not as open and truthful."

In terms of her own political sensitivities, Foster said, "I pride myself on knowing as much about feminism as the next person, and not being scared to say I'm a feminist, but at the same time, its role in our society has changed dramatically, because our traditions are changing. So sometimes the theories fit, and sometimes they just don't, because people are evolving."

Working on *CONTACT* was a new level of acting challenge, said Foster: "I think the fact that the movie is so technical, and there's so much suspension of disbelief in terms of acting to blue screen, and having so many technical things to do in every scene, you have to be truthful and real in completely different ways. Even though you have to find a place to be undistractedly focused, even though you're hanging from wires, on a blue screen, when you're supposed to be in the center of the galaxy. And that, I think, was a big challenge. I'd never done that." □

Robert Zemeckis (right) directs Foster for a scene of Dr. Arroway appearing to give her opinion on how best to respond to the first contact made by aliens.



mercial TV broadcasts: Der Fuhrer addressing the 1936 German Olympics. Referring to the visual portrayal of this signal, production designer Ed Verreaux credited video engineer Ian Kelly as one of the key people: "He had a lot to do with helping clarify everyone's mind as to how video works, the different kinds of signals and how the message could be layered within pulses, and the look of the Hitler playback. The people who should get the lion's share of the credit are the people at Sony Imageworks; they really developed all the playback. This movie is about windows and monitors; looking out of windows onto grand vistas, and seeing things played back on monitors from someplace across the world."

Asked about the level and quality of Sony Imageworks' effects in *CONTACT*, compared with the spectacular work in *FORREST GUMP*, producer Steve Starkey said the two projects have different needs; he noted that Ken Ralston is still making use of the technology developed for the earlier film, but that it "probably is not going to be as apparent, if that's the word, in *CONTACT* as it was in *GUMP*—stuff like interacting with presidents and Lieutenant Dan's legs: effects which are kind of really in your face. A lot of what we're doing in *CONTACT* is more of the same, but done in a more complicated way, and we take more liberties. For example, when you're filming large crowds in Washington DC, which we did again in this movie, rather than have camera lock-off, which we did in *GUMP*, we're actually moving the camera more, and making it feel like more fluid photography, as if you had those hundreds of thousands of people there. Going from helicopter shots that continue in a crane shot, and moving shots down roads, with throngs of people, all manipulated digitally. It's stuff that everyone will feel, 'Oh, it's just another helicopter shot with a bunch of people out in the desert,' when actually it was all created by the use of this new technology."

This is the first project as production designer for Ed Verreaux, having worked as art di-

PRODUCER STEVE STARKEY

"CONTACT represents a moment to investigate your own personal truths against a spectacular backdrop, while trying to discover some truth in the universe."



CONTACT producer Steve Starkey lounges on location at Arecibo, Puerto Rico, which is the sight of the largest radio telescope in the world.

rector or assistant art director on *CASPER*, *HONEY I BLEW UP THE KID*, and *BACK TO THE FUTURE 2* and *3*. Science fiction is an area Verreaux enjoys, and he likes what was presented in this project: "On a film with the scope of *CONTACT* there were a whole lot of conceptual issues at the very beginning. That's the real challenge: working with a director like Bob and being able to get a sense of what he wants to do, and then offer stuff up to him and coming to some kind of consensus about the design. It's been a really dynamic and challenging process. I'm getting more and more a sense of the whole, and how it's going to come out. It's pretty exciting."

Moving from art direction to production design is a big change in level of involvement, said Verreaux: "It's much, much broader in scope: having to interface a whole lot more with all the departments; trying to put together, with the director, a visual direction that the movie's going to go in; and then just trying to keep it on track. With art direction, for instance, you don't usually get to choose colors of sets and stuff, but as pro-

duction designer, you do. You're working on a much broader canvas, to use the painter analogy. It's both more satisfying and a lot scarier, because you know what'll happen if they get on the set and say, 'Mustard yellow! This color looks like crap.' And they don't look at the art director; they look at me."

Besides the pod that will carry Dr. Arroway to the aliens (see sidebar), Verreaux and his team also designed the set for the NASA control room: "We went around and around on that, and also the shipboard control and designing the ship. We also built on stage a large executive hover-jet. The ship was part of [the story's] Hadden Industries—he's sort of a Bill Gates multi-national, multi-billionaire character—and he has all these resources, including a supertanker. What I had thought of was when scientists do deep oceanographic work lots of times, they have these container-like rooms they can just strap down on the deck of a ship, and that becomes your working space. So we did a large sketch on the idea of having a thousand-foot-long supertanker or

superfreighter, and they've taken this modular control room and strapped it onto the deck. And Bob [Zemeckis] mentioned there are these companies that go drilling for oil in the middle of the Amazon, and have these self-contained units they fly in by helicopter, and drop them down, and in a day you've got a little village. So we liked that idea too."

Verreaux says they wanted to make the control room "look like NASA, but not really be NASA; that was really interesting. Early on, we went down to NASA and got the VIP tour. We got to go up on the gantry, with the Shuttle there, and got to stick our heads in the Shuttle while they were preparing it, and got to go in one of the three big firing rooms they have. At one point we were even talking about using one of those rooms, but it's always more efficacious, if you can, to do it on a stage, because you've got a lot more control. I first started with a copy of what's down there, but Bob said it looked too much like a James Bond set. Then we began to play with it, and I think in the end everyone felt we came up with a pretty satisfying solution."

Real locations may have been abandoned for use as interiors, but several exterior locations were used for *CONTACT*, including the VLA (Very Large Array), a field of 27 huge dish-shaped radio telescopes located in the desert of Socorro, New Mexico, and at the world's largest radio telescope in Arecibo, Puerto Rico. Starkey recalls there were some major challenges involved in the shooting: "The obvious obstacle in going to these two places is that they are government-run facilities, and of course time is bought by individuals to pursue very specific things. They have little tolerance for movie making; they've got business to attend to. So we got involved, like at the VLA, in a negotiation for what we'll call 'dish control time,' when that huge array is pointed in a specific direction."

Based on the script, the filmmakers created a distinct orientation for the dishes to point at

the start, and then move to a new position. Starkey said, "Having to shoot the same thing over and over from different angles, our complexity was that our scene was at predawn, that magical time between when the sun sets and it's dark, or when it's dark in the morning and the sun rises. Those are the only times you can create that look, and that's the time in the story when Ellie actually hears the sound: she sits up, and she starts driving, races down the road, calls in the coordinates to the people inside. She races inside, the machine locks in; they hear the pulse, and—boom—the sun comes up. It's all timed in the screenplay."

All of these shots, Starkey pointed out, "are big, massive set-ups, in that little window in which we also need dish control time. The first morning we were there it rained like they've never seen it in October, ever. Then it's so muddy you can't drive on these slick, clay roads. The next morning it was blowing so hard you couldn't even have a camera on a crane, it was near-hurricane conditions. Finally the rains stopped, and we were setting up for a big scene with helicopters zooming in, where the government wants to take over this facility, and they got this ground fog so bad you couldn't even see the dishes! I got rain, I got mud, I got high winds and then fog, and it was like I was about to kill myself. But anyway, we got all the shots. We also had as a technical advisor an astronomer who's doing this work, so we had a lot of sympathetic souls around in the trenches with us, who saw we

CO-PRODUCER ANN DRUYAN

"Losing my husband has made the triumph of CONTACT's release bittersweet. What I've seen thrills me, and I think, 'That's fantastic. Isn't Carl [Sagan] going to love this?'"



CONTACT's star, Jodie Foster, has never been a big fan of science fiction films "unless there was a real human connection, and then I completely go with it."

were doing the best we could, and that they should help us out a little. At Arecibo we had a lot of unseasonable rain, but other than that, everything went very smoothly, in fact. The Arecibo antenna is staggering; it's such a huge object it's hard to capture on film."

Starkey began his long association with Robert Zemeckis in 1986 as an associate producer on WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT, and went on to help create the second and third BACK TO THE FUTURE

films, DEATH BECOMES HER, and FORREST GUMP. Having been involved with Lucasfilm as assistant film editor on THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK and RETURN OF THE JEDI, and associate producer of Spielberg's AMAZING STORIES, Starkey commented on his interests in science fiction and fantasy projects: "As a boy, I certainly read my share of science fiction, meaning Ray Bradbury and Isaac Asimov, and a variety of things. In college I took this course called 'Sociology of the Possible' and you read a lot of science fiction, and it was really about projecting all the possibilities of societies in the future. But I would say when I've been going through my film work, I never had it in my mind that I was seeking a science fiction-related project. It's just that the movie work I got happened to be a lot of science fiction in nature. I was really pursuing film work with Lucas, then with Spielberg, then with Bob; it's just that each of them chose science fiction at the time I landed there. And Bob always has had a bent on reality in most of his

movies, so anytime you would have landed into Bob's realm, whether in the past or now, you would have landed where reality is slightly askew."

Starkey feels CONTACT "represents a moment to investigate your own personal truths in a film, against a wonderful spectacular backdrop, so for that reason it's very special, because we seem to be going down to an emotional core of our pivotal character and trying to discover something about her, while at the same time she's trying to discover some truth in the universe. I think a lot of people my age are thinking about that, so I think it's timely in my life and many people's lives, and hopefully you will enjoy a film while you're thinking about it."

For his part, while acknowledging the importance of the scientific and philosophical ramifications inherent in the subject matter, Zemeckis does not want the finished film to present these elements in a heavy-handed manner that might dwarf the story. "It is a fantastic situation that is proposed in the story, and it does deal with new age philosophy, religion, science, politics, the media—which is what I think would happen in reality," he said, adding, "I hope that none of that gets clouded by what's really the most important essence of the movie, which is a certain humanity and warmth."

Of all the people connected with the project, for Druyan, obviously, the significance of the film has the greatest depth of meaning, on a personal level: "Losing my husband has made even the triumphant sense of CONTACT's imminent release upon the world bittersweet," she said. "I've seen a little bit of it, and what I see thrills me, and I think, 'Oh, that's fantastic,' and then my first thought is 'Isn't Carl going to love this?' And then my second thought is how irrevocable and brutal the acceptance of death is, that this person you've loved and worked with for twenty years is never going to see it. It takes some of the pleasure away. But I have the sense this is an event looming on the horizon." □

Dr. Arroway confronts the problem of establishing communication with an alien intelligence, starting with simple basic mathematical formulae.



CONTACT

TOM SKERRITT

The ALIEN actor mulls a return trip to outer space.

Describing his film role of David Drumlin, actor Tom Skerritt (*ALIEN*) said, "First of all, relative to the book and out of respect to [Carl] Sagan, I understand he's a composite of several people Sagan had described—I haven't read the book—but also more than what Sagan had described. He's ambitious, obviously—a successful conservative scientist, if there is such a thing. He's practical-minded for his own political reasons; he becomes a presidential advisor, and it takes some politics to do that. However, a less practical reality presents itself—i.e. the possibility of going to explore extraterrestrial life elsewhere—and his colors really surface, and he's able to manipulate himself into a position that Jodie [as Ellie Arroway] deserves and wants."

In his novel, Sagan at one point describes Ellie's attitude toward Drumlin: "She found him frequently combative and unremittingly self-indulgent." Skerritt responded, "Yeah, that's pretty much it, though a lot of that is sort of implied. Certainly you see it. He's a conservative, chauvinist political pig. Brilliant to be where he is, and an effective scientist, but nonetheless certainly interested in his own advancement when the time comes."

In the film, the relationship between Ellie (Foster) and Drumlin (Skerritt) is, according to Skerritt, "tenuous. I think she's very strong-minded in this thing. What drives her, and Jodie herself, is that if you believe anything strong enough, long enough, you will experience it in some fashion. Which is a moral that all of us need to be reminded of in our lives. We tend to lose focus on, as Joseph Campbell said, 'our bliss.' Or perhaps not even recognize it. I think both Drumlin and she, in their own ways, are cut off from their emotional life. He's ambitious and self-involved, a loner; and she's a loner who's cut off emotionally because of the trauma of her father being taken from her when she was ten years old, and she was alone. She's cut herself off emotionally and just focused in her life on what she wanted to do in terms of the stars, and that's been her whole life, and it's kept her apart from her humanity. He's the guy who's been linear about his practical, conservative approach to science, and has used it to politicalize himself into the position of being the



Tom Skerritt plays David Drumlin, an ambitious, manipulative scientist who uses his position as presidential advisor to try to replace Dr. Ellie Arroway in the pod mission.

presidential scientific advisor, which is a position he uses to launch his own ambition to go out into the stars and push her aside, when she's the one who found that life out there and wanted to go and perhaps deserves to go."

A number of his characters, Skerritt agrees, have been men in situations where they are perplexed and nonplused by very strong, articulate, and passionate women characters, such as those created by Kathy Baker (*PICKET FENCES*), Sigourney Weaver (*ALIEN*). "STEEL MAGNOLIAS as well," he added, "and *TURNING POINT*." He confirms this quality of role has not been a particularly conscious choice on his part: "I think the business imposes that on you, that 'he or she is effective in that movie as that,' and I had that image for me, and filmmakers always want to play it safe. You go with that which you know: you've seen that person do that; therefore..."

Though not especially interested in science personally, Skerritt said that what does intrigue him is "the exploration of possibility, which I think is a definition of science. It's always intrigued me, in some way. Some of us in the film business are scientists, always exploring. Being creative is a scientific pursuit—willing to hang it out there." He finds SETI, UFOs, and related alien topics of interest "only as much as I do about ghosts, or reincarnation. I mean, there's a possibility, but I don't live my life by that. One day at a time is basically how I live my life. I think a lot of this is like believing in astrology, like not going out your front door if you think

some foreboding thing is going to happen. I just don't think life is that way. If something is foreboding, you face it; you deal with it. You go out that damn door, and if a truck's coming at you, at least you're not prey to someone else's superstition. The best scientists, the best creators, just go at life."

What Skerritt found satisfying about *CONTACT* was "working with Zemeckis, working with Jodie Foster, with Jimmy Woods, Angela Bassett, and Matthew McConaughey. All truly fine people, intelligent people, stimulating people. And Zemeckis as a filmmaker—I'm a better professional, having worked with this guy."

Directing is one of his continuing interests, said Skerritt: "It's what I was going for at UCLA so many years ago. I thought if I was going to direct,

I've got to know what acting is, what writing is, so I've continued to write over the years, and somehow I was seen acting in a play and hired to be an actor in a movie a long time ago, with Robert Redford. Which is where our friendship started, back to my first job. He develops his work, and I develop mine. We're very independent guys, who go off in the woods and love to live with ourselves alone, so I guess we relate a lot on that level. We correspond occasionally, check in and make sure the other one is okay, but we don't do much professional work together. He had asked me to be in *ORDINARY PEOPLE*, but I had signed to be in another picture. Then *A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT*—he asked me to be in that and I was able to do it."

Skerritt has directed episodes of *PICKET FENCES*, the early 90s' series (still to be seen on cable) for which he won an Emmy as an actor, and he recently directed (and starred in) a made-for-cable film *DIVIDED BY HATE*, which was based on an actual incident: "It happened in the early '80s. A young couple get involved with one of those Bible study groups that turns out to be a neo-Nazis. Farmers in those days were losing their farms. Small farms, as you know, have been disappearing, and a lot of them banded together with these certain leaders who said, 'The Jews own the banks,' and they were doing that number with them. USA Cable is doing three movies on hate groups in America, and this is one of them. So it's significant in that sense; it's what's going on."

Douglas Eby

STARGATE SG-1

MGM-TV goes into the breach once more with this tele-version of the hit film.

By Frank Garcia

MGM-TV's latest series, **STARGATE SG-1**, will premiere on Showtime this fall. Based on the 1994 hit film from Roland Emmerich and Dean Devlin (**INDEPENDENCE DAY**), the show is the fulfillment of an agreement between MGM-TV and Showtime Cable to produce a trio of science fiction TV series, which began with **THE OUTER LIMITS** and **POLTERGEIST: THE LEGACY**. The one-hour series stars Richard Dean Anderson in the role of Colonel O'Neil, previously portrayed by Kurt Russell. The executive producers are Brad Wright and Jonathan Glassner, who also produces **OUTER LIMITS**.

With Glassner and Wright, MGM-TV had a pair of experienced producers who also specialized in writing and directing. Encouraged by their strong interest and excitement about the potential of **STARGATE** as a series, MGM, which had released the film, gave the go-ahead on the project. Although filmmakers Emmerich and Devlin were initially asked to come onboard the series, they bowed out when it became apparent that MGM would not give them the kind of creative carte blanche they expected. (See *CFQ* 28:12.)

For **STARGATE** to be viable as a series, Glassner and Wright had to devise a storyline that would propel Colonel O'Neil, Daniel Jackson, the U.S. military, and others through the Stargate and into the universe each week. This storyline would, of course, allow aliens to come to Earth as well.

In "Children of the Gods,"



The television series **STARGATE SG-1** abandons the epic **LAWRENCE OF ARABIA** desert look of the feature film for more modest and affordable location work.

the two-hour pilot directed by Mario Azzopardi, the story begins a year after the events of the film. The Stargate project, secluded at a military outpost, is basically shut down because they can't get it to do anything else. But when alien serpent guards step out from the Gate, killing several officers and kidnapping one of them into the Gate, the project is reactivated.

"They bring in O'Neil," said Glassner, "who confesses that Daniel's not really dead. [At the end of the film] he had told [his bosses] that Daniel was dead. They were supposed to blow up the planet, but they never did; they sent him to get Daniel."

In the film, O'Neil and his team left Jackson behind with his new-found love, Sha'uri, and her people, so that he could study their planet and help them create a better life. Upon returning to Abydos in the pilot, O'Neil discovers that Jackson has learned a great deal during his stay on the planet. Jackson takes the team to an enormous cavern where a gigantic wall of

hieroglyphics reveals galactic coordinates that can be dialed on the Stargate to access a network of Stargates that are littered throughout the universe. "The problem is the coordinates don't work," said Glassner. "One of the team members, Dr. Samantha Carter, who's an astrophysicist, figures out that due to planetary drift, due to the expanding universe, you have to adjust the coordinates to get it to work today, the way it worked 2,000 years ago."

But when Sha'uri is kidnapped by a pair of serpent guards, Jackson returns with O'Neil to Earth. Together, they must learn how to use the Stargate and its galactic network in order to find her. "The movie is about going to rescue them. In the course of doing so, they discover what Ra really was," hinted Glassner.

The pilot and series will reveal the origins of Ra's species, a parasitic serpent race that possesses human bodies and are called the Goa'ulds. The alien serpents insert themselves into

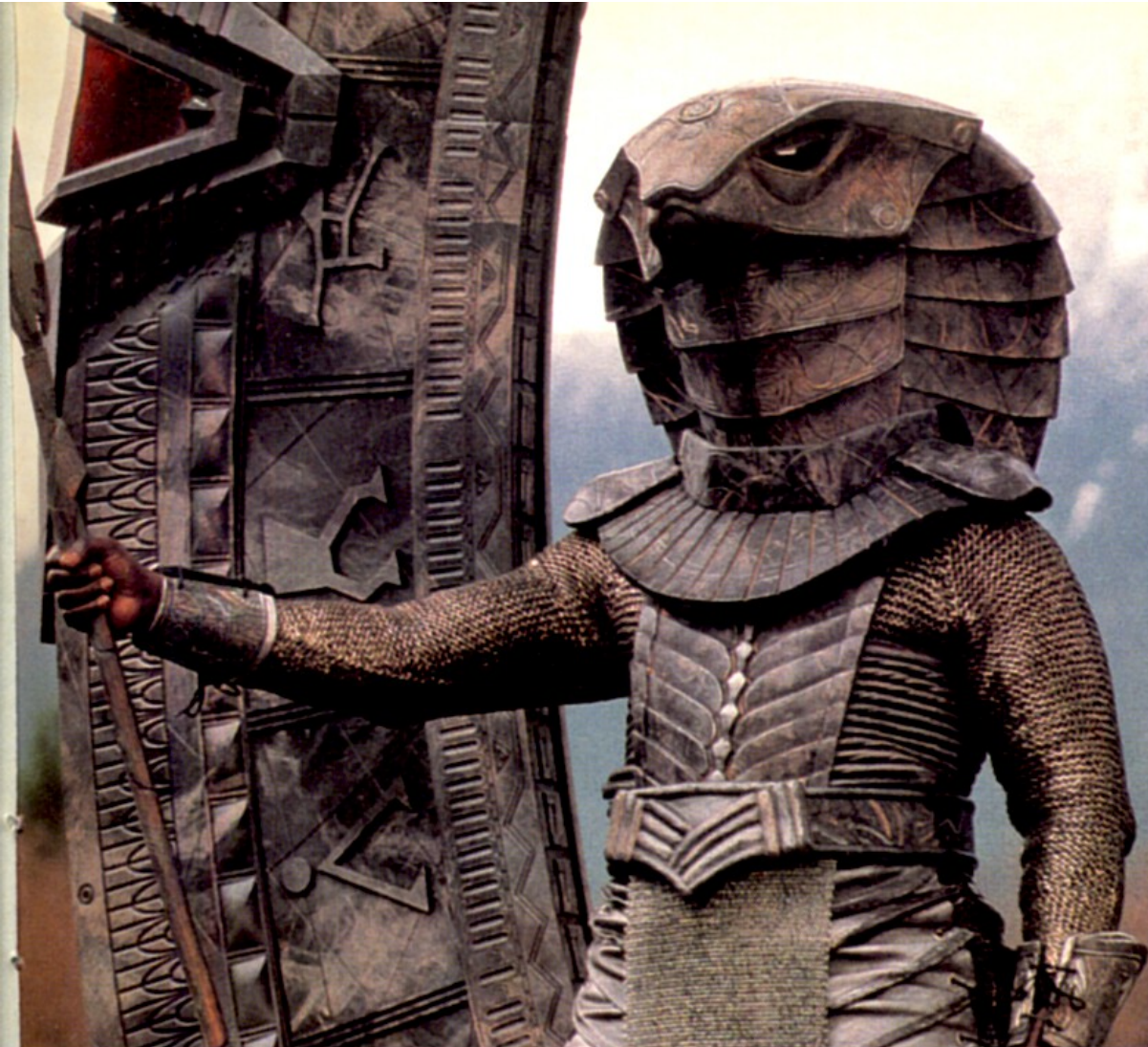
humans through the back of their necks. Civilizations throughout the universe regard Goa'ulds as gods.

During events in the series premiere, O'Neil and the team will discover they have a new enemy: Apophis, Ra's rival, who is also a Goa'uld. In fact, it is Apophis's serpent-guards who have been traveling to both Earth and Abydos kidnapping humans for unknown purposes.

Describing the tone of the series, exec producer Brad Wright said, "I think we can get mystery of the universe; I think we can get wonder; we can do adventure. What we can't do—but will try to

do to a certain extent in our two-hour pilot—is epic! It would be silly to try to achieve that on an ongoing basis. Epic is sweeping vistas of the vast desert, giant pyramids. But we have a strong team of characters, who our audience will be able to get to know. And as you get to know characters better, we can follow them through adventures big and small. Not every episode we attempt to do is going to be a big monster show. But, in order to do the occasional big show, we're going to do some shows perhaps set on Earth."

Both Glassner and Wright have been immersing themselves not only in Egyptian lore but in anything concerning ancient civilizations. "There's a lot of fascinating correlations between different ancient cultures," said Glassner. "Mayans and Egyptians were on opposite locations on the planet, but both had pyramids; both had similar production techniques. Some of their gods and deities, on paintings and carvings on the walls,



A snake guard poses before the Stargate located on Abydos, the planet seen in the film. The series posits a series of Stargates throughout the universe.

were similar. We're saying the reason for that is that they're all actually Goa'ulds. That's what Ra was and what Apophis is on our show. They were all on Earth, ruling at different time periods."

"The more I learn about ancient cultures, the more I realize how far this series can go!" exclaimed Wright, who hopes to see a seven-year run for the show. "I find myself sort of lacking in knowledge. When you think about it, the stories that we're telling about faraway planets are also stories about our ancient cultures."

For actor Richard Dean Anderson—who's best known to television audiences as the title character of *MACGYVER*—joining the *STARGATE* mission is an exciting time. "The concept of a Stargate is great for exploration on a TV series," he declared. "One of the selfish reasons I wanted to be a part of this is I've never explored the genre before. I wanted to see what the possibilities were. It's very dynamic and full of adventure. We can go anywhere and do anything. That, I think, is what makes *STARGATE* unique."

Anderson made it clear that he will personalize his rendition of Jack O'Neil. "One of the things I needed to have in place conceptually before I could come on board was an adjustment in the character, and that's to allow me to bring a sense of

humor—a different approach altogether. Jonathan, Brad, and MGM were very amenable. What I told them was 'Life's too short! And if I can't have fun doing what I'm doing, I don't want to be doing it.' Everybody looked at each other, and there was a semblance of common sense that we all understood.

"I'm ecstatic to be part of an ensemble cast," added Anderson, whose role on *MACGYVER* kept him on screen "99% of the time. I couldn't be happier to be part of an ensemble show. In fact, that was almost one of the stipulations I was making. I'm a team player; I like to assist in getting the story told on the screen. I'm sort of acknowledging to myself that jumping off tall buildings,

crashing cars, bouncing down mountains might be better left for another generation."

Joining Anderson in this ensemble are Michael Shanks as archaeologist Daniel Jackson (replacing James Spader) and Amanda Tapping as astrophysicist Dr. Samantha Carter.

Describing Jackson's fate since we last saw him, Shanks said, "Daniel has finally found a home on this planet. During this story we find that home is taken away from him. It was a home in which, for the first time in Daniel's life, he felt could be himself. He was accepted for who he was. When it's taken away from him, he pursues that. He wants to find it again. So, the quest through the various locations through the Stargate to different planets is to find that home he once had."

As Sam Carter, Tapping's character will share her knowledge of astrophysics with Jackson, and together they will make the Stargate technology active once again. "I'm a Captain in the Air Force," said Tapping. "I fought in the Gulf War. But my true love is science. I'm a theoretical astrophysicist. When I meet Daniel, I'm in awe of him because I've been studying his Gate technology for years. And when they first went through [the Gate during the film], I wanted to go. My character's not in the film, but I wanted to go through the Gate then, and I couldn't. So, when I meet him, it's a dream come true. But I also have to be a military girl. Meeting Daniel is a great thing for my character because it gives me a chance to



The Stargate, dormant since the events of the feature film, comes to life again in the pilot when a group of snake guards attack Earth.

show that other side. I think I'm the hybrid of two characters. I'm a bit of Jack and a bit of Daniel."

Also in the cast are D. Christopher Judge as Teal'c, a serpent guard who will join the Stargate team in their adventures, sharing his knowledge of the universe with them. Teal'c is a unique character. He is a Jaffa. Jaffa's are humanoids who carry baby Goa'uld serpents inside pouches in their bellies like marsupials. When the Goa'uld grows to maturity, it has to be removed and inserted into a human host to survive.

Actor Don S. Davis (best known to audiences as Major Briggs on *TWIN PEAKS*) is General Hammond, who will direct the missions. In recurring roles as Stargate team SG-2, are Jay Acovone as Kawalsky and Brent Stait as Ferretti.

So, what's in store for the *STARGATE* team in future episodes? "We'll do a lot of exploring of where ancient mythologies come from on other planets," said Glassner. "We will discover that the Goa'ulds have taken humans from all over the universe, and most of the planets are populated by humans who have evolved from thousands of years ago when they were from here and taken there. We'll be exploring a lot of different times, not just that one period. If we stuck to that one, I think we'd run out of steam fast." □

L to r: Amanda Tapping as Dr. Carter, Richard Dean Anderson (*MACGYVER*) as O'Neil, D. Christopher Judge as Teal'c, and Michael Shanks as Daniel Jackson.





Oscars in Too

A brief appreciation of excellence in an

Nestled somewhere among the numerous categories on the often long-winded Oscar night can be found some of the most creative and innovative films from that year. The nominees and winners selected for Best Animated Short Subject have become much more than just "cartoons," even if that was the original title the Academy gave to the category.

by Mike Lyons

The first award, entitled "Best Short Subject, Cartoon or Novelty," was given to the Disney studio in 1932, for *FLOWERS AND TREES*, the first Technicolor animated short ever made. This landmark Disney "Silly Symphony" centered on the anthropomorphic title char-

acters, who save the forest from a raging fire.

Production on the short originally began in black and white, but Walt Disney himself insisted that it be remade in color. He even went so far as to obtain an exclusive two-year contract with the Technicolor company, ensuring that Disney would be the only studio using the revolutionary process. This may explain why, for the next

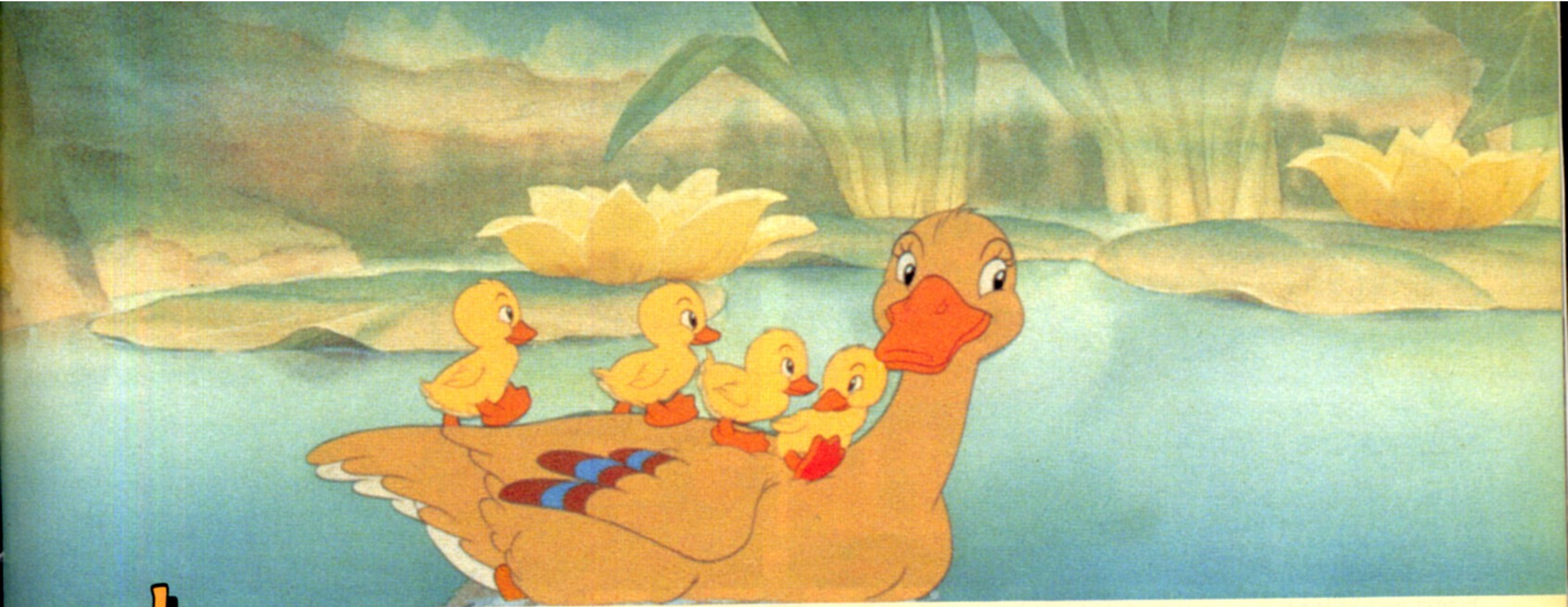
seven years, the studio had a "lock" on the Oscar for Best Cartoon short subject, winning each year from 1932 through 1938.

Disney's 1932 Oscar success continued the following year with *THE THREE LITTLE PIGS* (1933). The most famous of Disney's "Silly Symphonies," it's the one that gave the world "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf," a song that became an anthem for the weary days of the Depression. Some of the studio's other winners during this period were *FERDINAND THE BULL* (1938), *THE UGLY DUCKLING* (1939), and *THE OLD MILL* (1937), which also brought the studio a technical award for its creation of the Multi-Plane Camera, a device that brought a sense of depth to all the studio's future animated films.

The short subject that broke the Disney grip on Oscar was *THE MILKY WAY* (1940), produced by MGM, one of the Disney studios top rivals. Throughout the subsequent war years, the two studio's would play Oscar tag, passing the award back and forth to one another.

One Disney short, *DER*





ntown

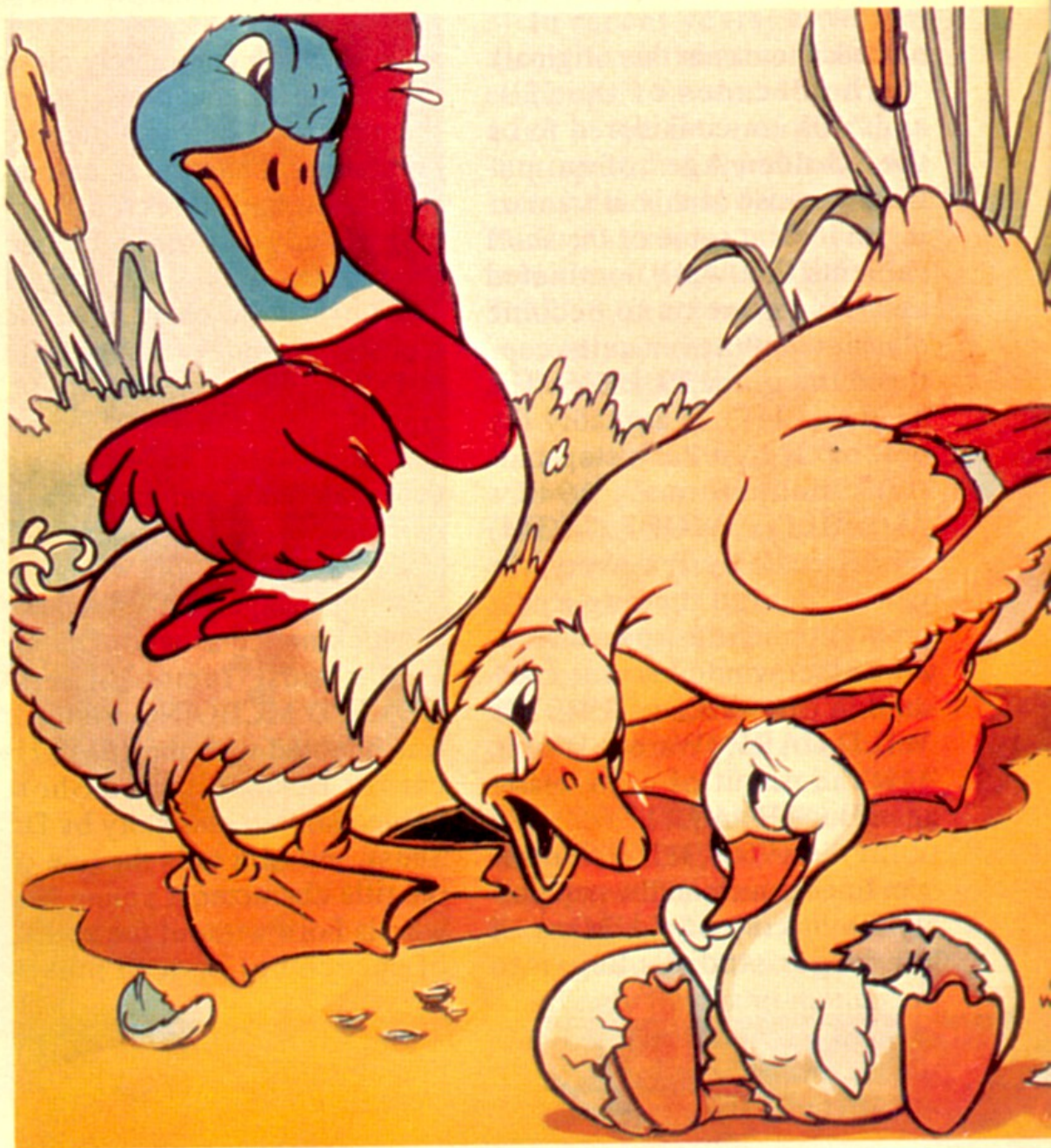
overlooked category.

FUEHRER'S FACE, which won the 1942 Oscar, went on to become one of the most popular of the wartime period. In the short, we witness Donald Duck living in "Deutschland" under Hitler's regime and working in a munitions factory. It sounds malevolent and in bad taste, but the fast pace of the short, coupled with Spike Jones' humorous title song, made for one of the studio's most creative and, at times, most lavish experiments in the short subject field. All works out well in the short, too, as Donald wakes from his nightmare, declares that it's wonderful to be a citizen of the United States, and hugs a small Statue of Liberty that's sitting on his window ledge. After the ending credits, a caricature of Hitler appears, which is promptly "splatted" in the face by a tomato, supposedly thrown by a member of the audience (gotta love that propaganda).

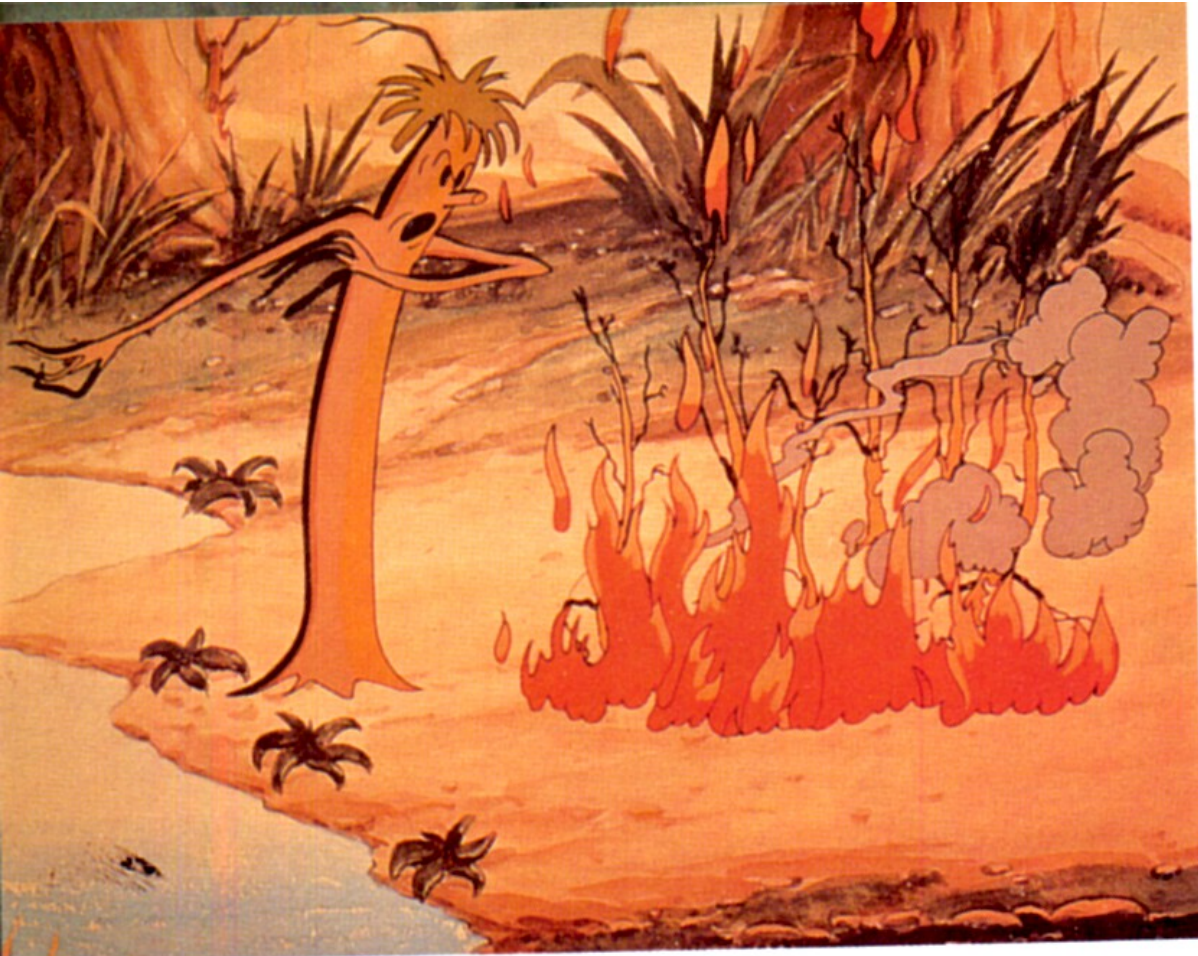
MGM's biggest franchise, the cat and mouse team of Tom and Jerry won their first Oscar for 1944's *MOUSE TROUBLE*, but arguably one of their

best outings was the film that won two years later, *THE CAT CONCERTO*. In the short, Jerry the mouse destroys Tom cat's recital, by jumping into the strings and keys of the piano. The short was the ultimate of the duo's hilarious and painful game of one-upmanship. The troublesome twosome would bring MGM two other Oscars during the forties, for the shorts *YANKEE DOODLE MOUSE* (1943) and *QUIET PLEASE* (1945).

In addition to MGM, Disney's other major rival at this time was the Warner Bros. studio. Their stable of Looney Tunes, geared slightly more toward adult sensibilities, proved to be a more urban alternative to the sunny side of Disney. Warner Bros. had been producing shorts for over a decade before winning their first Oscar for *TWEETY PIE* in 1947. The short, directed by the late, great animation legend Friz Freleng, featured the first appearance of the "tweet wittle" yellow canary and his rival Sylvester the cat (who was inexplicably



Throughout the 1930s, Disney had a lock on the animated short category, with a string of winners including 1939's *THE UGLY DUCKLING* (top and middle right) and *FERDINAND THE BULL* (1938, bottom right). Opposite page: more recent winners include Nick Park's stop-motion masterpiece *A CLOSE SHAVE*.



In 1932, the first winner in the category, (then titled "Cartoon or Novelty") was Disney's **FLOWERS AND TREES**, which was also the first Technicolor animated short.

named Thomas in this original).

The decades of the '30s and '40s are considered to be the "Golden Age" of animation. Because of this, it's amazing to look at some of the short subjects that were nominated and have gone on to become classics, but never quite captured the gold: **TUBBY THE TUBA** (1947), is arguably the best of George Pal's stop-motion "puppetoons"; 1942's **THE BLITZ WOLF** (MGM) was directed by Tex Avery, the genius behind the bug-eyed, jaw-dropping, fast-paced technique that would become standard in cartoons, and 1940's **A WILD HARE** (Warner Bros.), saw the debut of none other than Bugs Bunny.

In the 1950s, television began to encroach on the popularity movies once held. Many of the larger studio's began to

scale down or completely close their animation facilities. Out of this upheaval sprang a graphic revolution. A handful of animators, who had defected from major studios, formed United Productions of America (UPA). The new studio challenged the realistic and quasi-realistic style of Disney, Warners, and MGM, creating a style that was sparse, flat, and modern in look, with deliberate static and limited animation.

For audiences this was a refreshing change, and the Academy took notice as well. One of UPA's most famous films, **GERALD MCBOING BOING**, was honored with the 1951 Oscar for Best Animated Short Subject. Based on a story by Dr. Seuss, the film tells the tale of the title character, a young boy who is born without the ability of speech but instead makes

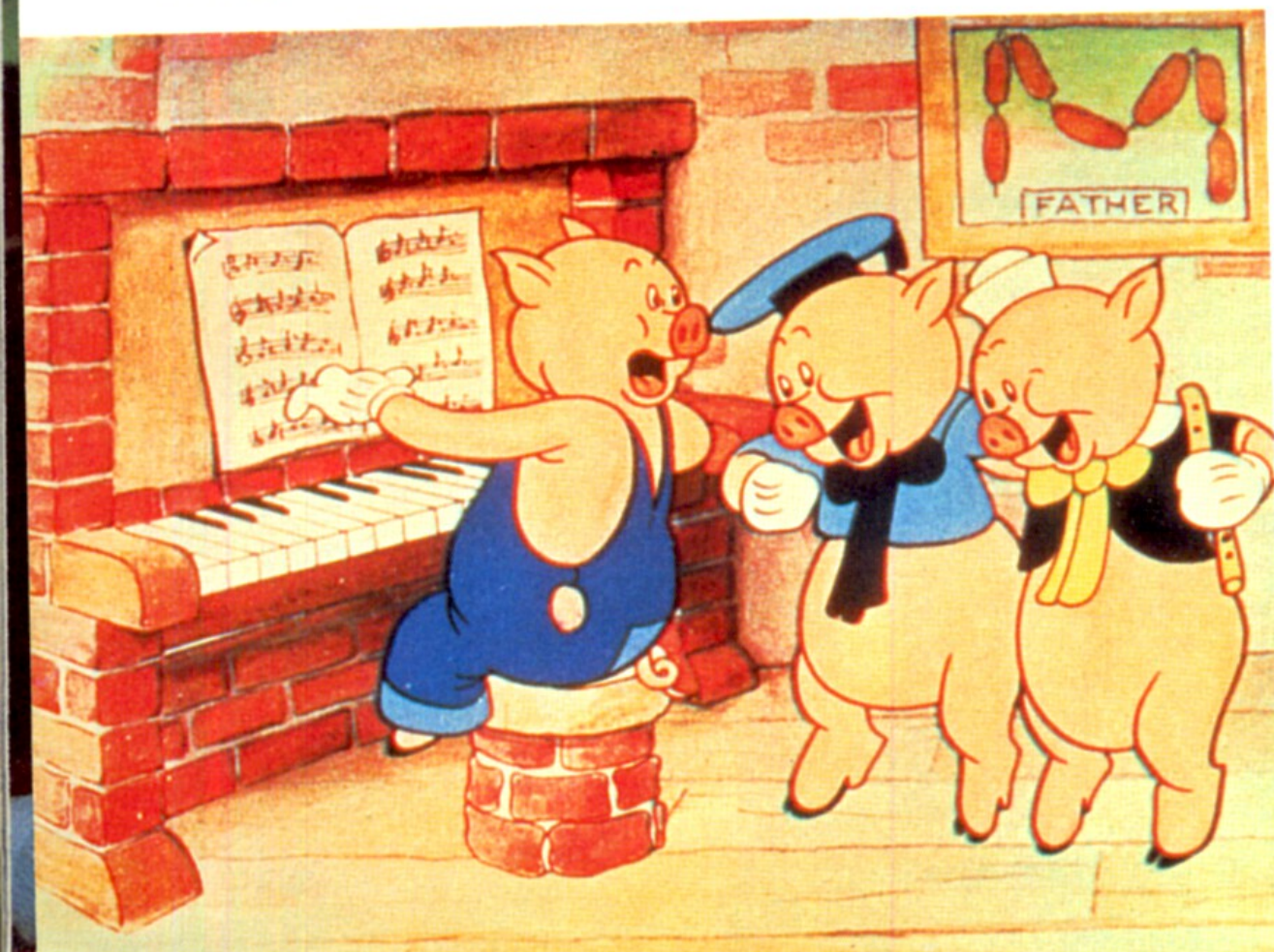
loud noises and assorted sounds when he opens his mouth. In this "Ugly Duckling" tale of someone who is different finding a place in the world, poor Gerald is taunted until he is hired by a radio station to do sound effects, and becomes a national sensation. Told with the graphic simplicity of a children's book, **GERALD** is a unique film, touching and realistic, with a look that's nowhere near reality.

In addition to its different approach to animation, the UPA studio is also remembered for creating the eccentric nearsighted character of Mr. Magoo, who would bring the studio two Oscars for **WHEN MAGOO FLEW** (1954) and **MR. MAGOO'S PUDDLE JUMPER** (1956).

The "UPA look," as it came to be known, would indeed

have a profound affect on the animation industry. Television would latch on (and some say ruin) UPA's concept of limited animation, using it not for artistic technique but for cost cutting, assembly line shows. The other major studios would also try their hand at this more modernistic look for their theatrical shorts. In an ironic twist, Disney, the studio that was in the opposing camp from UPA, would produce the short subject **TOOT, WHISTLE, PLUNK AND BOOM** (1953), which told the "history of music" using this "UPA look," and would go on to win that year's Oscar.

In the sixties, one of UPA's artists would branch out on his own, paving the way for what would become the most creative field of the industry: independent animation. John Hubley began his career as an ani-



THE THREE LITTLE PIGS (1933), the most famous of Disney's "Silly Symphonies," became the studio's second Oscar winning short.



mator at Disney and then moved on as a guiding force at UPA. Together with his wife, Faith, they would continue to break down the barriers of the medium, by using unexpected styles, story lines, and even sound tracks. One of their most celebrated films, *MOONBIRD*, won the 1959 Oscar. The film, which centers on two young boys trying to capture an elusive bird, sprang from a recording the Hubleys had made of their children at play. The animation was improvised around the recording, resulting in a more free-form production.

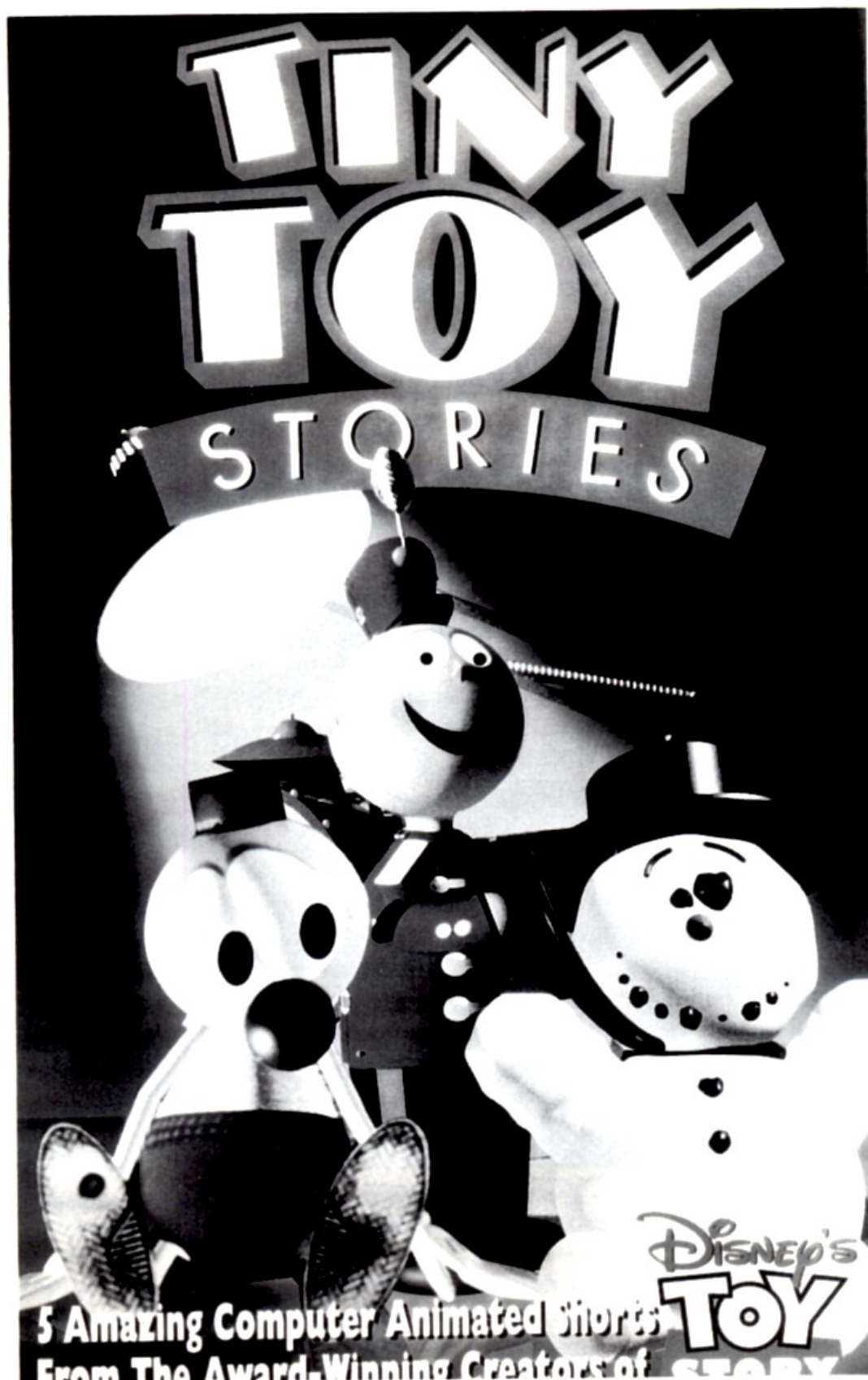
The decade would continue to bring Oscars to the larger studios, as characters such as the Pink Panther (*THE PINK PHINK*, 1964) and Winnie the Pooh (*WINNIE THE POOH AND THE BLUSTERY DAY*, 1968) took home the gold. In 1965, the comic genius of Chuck Jones was awarded an Oscar for his MGM short, *THE DOT AND THE LINE*, which, using the title characters, took an off-kilter look at shape relations.

Chuck Jones also produced 1972's winner, *A CHRISTMAS CAROL*. Directed by Richard Williams (who would go on to direct animation for *WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT*), the short was a brooding and often scary re-telling of the Dickens perennial, using evocative pencil-sketch renderings of the characters and backgrounds.

The '70s and '80s would become one of the bleakest periods for animation, a time when Disney was producing only one new feature every three to four years and static television animation dominated the marketplace. But from this climate sprang an abundance of independent animators, who continued to produce some of the industry's most experimental, daring and entertaining films.

One of the greatest safe havens for independent animators has been the National Film Board of Canada, which has collected quite a cache of Oscars through the years. The Board's winner for 1978, *SPECIAL DELIVERY*, has the look of child-like colored pencil drawings and a story straight out of a film-noir pot-

The nominees and winners for Best Animated Short Subject have become much more than just "cartoons," even if that was the original title of the category.



John Lasseter's 1988 Oscar winner, *TIN TOY*, showcased the computer generated animation that he would later use to great success in *TOY STORY*.

boiler. The short centers on what happens to poor Mr. Phelps, a suburbanite who tries to get rid of the dead body of a mailman, who slipped on Phelps' front walk and broke his neck.

The following year, the Board won again for *EVERY CHILD*. Produced in conjunction with UNICEF, the short depicts a baby being left on a doorstep and then passed on from house to house in a neigh-

borhood, stressing the message that all of us, in some way, are responsible for the children of the world.

In the '80s, the eclectic creativity of independent animation continued to snatch the Oscar each year: 1981's winner *CRAC* uses pastel-like images to tell the tale of a family's rocking chair; *ANNA AND BELLA*, 1985's winner, quietly tells the story of the love and rivalry between two sisters, and

A GREEK TRAGEDY, which won the following year, centers on three bizarre female gargoyles who struggle to keep the remains of an ancient Greek ruin in tact.

In 1988, the emerging technology of computer animation made its face known at the Oscars, when director John Lasseter's *TIN TOY* won for Best Animated Short Subject. The story of a small wind-up toy's desperate efforts to escape the clutches of a destructive baby, *TIN TOY* is interesting to watch today, as it seems to serve as a warm up for Lasseter's feature length blockbuster, *TOY STORY*.

In recent years, however, more traditional animation techniques have made a comeback at the Oscars, thanks in large part to Aardman Animation studios and director Nick Park. The studio's 1990 Oscar winner, *CREATURE COMFORTS*, is a marvel of stop-motion experimentation, as director Park improvises dialogue (much like the Hubleys) to make it seem as if he's interviewing zoo animals (the Puma who talks of how he craves the space of his native Brazil is the film's highlight).

Park and Aardman's next Oscars would come thanks to the creation of two of animation's greatest personalities, Wallace and Gromit. *THE WRONG TROUSERS* (1993) and *A CLOSE SHAVE* (1995) employed live-action, film noir-like staging, juxtaposed against hysterical, slap stick humor and startlingly fluid stop-motion animation. The films' Oscar attention, coupled with the recent animation renaissance, has deservedly endeared the put-upon pooch, Gromit and his clueless master, Wallace to a wide audience. Aardman's winning streak was broken this year when company founder Peter Lord's directing effort *WAT'S PIG* [see page 44] was nominated but lost to Thomas Stellmach's *QUEST*.

So, at each year's Oscar ceremony, stick around through the technical awards and the music medley dance numbers; then pay close attention to Best Animated Short Subject. You might just see the real "Best Picture of the Year."

PSYCHOTRONIC GURU

By Dan
Cziraky

Fresh from promoting *The Psychotronic Video Guide* at a sci-fi and horror film convention in deepest, darkest New Jersey, Michael J. Weldon admitted that his new volume of genre-film reviews is quite a bit meatier than the original *Psychotronic Encyclopedia of Film*. "Most cities have smaller telephone directories," he chuckled. "I continue to watch a lot of [videos] to provide review material for my magazine *Psychotronic Video*, and a lot of the reviews in the new book were originally in there, although there are probably just as many that weren't. I pretty much try not to look down on movies, although sometimes I can't help it. Sometimes, there's really nothing I can say other than, 'This is really derivative; this is really boring; this is really bad; I wasted my time, or I wasted my money.' Usually, I try to see what's really interesting or good about [a film], realizing that there's somebody to like anything. It's a cliché, but it's true: there's some element of any movie that somebody is going to enjoy, and that's true for almost every movie, I believe."

Weldon enjoys being the champion of films usually considered too bizarre or obscure to merit the notice of more up-scale sci-fi, horror, and B-movie publications. It's a job he's well-suited for, having been raised in the Cleveland, Ohio, suburb of Lakewood in the '50s and '60s on a steady diet of movies on TV and double-features at local drive-ins. "Cleveland had a horror movie host called Ghoultardi, who I watched religiously," Weldon explained. "He was on every Friday night and Saturday afternoon, showing the traditional Universal Pictures horror films, plus a pretty good mixture of fairly recent movies from the late '50s. So, I'd see a lot of Roger Corman and Bert I. Gordon, along with the Lugosi and Karloff stuff. I really got to be a horror movie fanatic because of watching

Michael J. Weldon leads readers to the depths of the cinematic swamp.



Michael J. Weldon, editor of *Psychotronic Video* magazine, recently released *The Psychotronic Video Guide*, an encyclopedia of obscure film titles.

his show. I liked Ghoultardi so much that I would go see him at live shows, and sometimes he'd be part of a charity softball game, or sometimes he'd be showing a movie. Before I went to high school, he was at my high school, and he was up on stage and presented the movie *THE THING*, which was great to see in a theater."

Weldon's movie mania was also fostered by his family. His parents and grandparents would take him to screenings at libraries and revival houses. "That's how I got to see *THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI* when I was still in school, and some silent classics, Lon Chaney things," he recalled. "My father is a magician, so I sometimes went to magic conventions and got to see Houdini serials and things like that when I was a kid. My grandparents used to get in free at a local theater because my grandfather used

to work there, so I saw a lot of new, big-budget, major films in the early '60s with them. I also went to Saturday matinees a lot, and that was a pretty great time for seeing double-bills, because there were all the Hammer films that were new, the Toho movies, and Mexican imports—all kinds. At the same time, like so many other people, I was discovering *Famous*

Monsters of Filmland magazine, and then the various other horror movie magazines that were on the newsstands at that time."

Weldon wrote his first film reviews for *CLE* magazine, put out by people he worked with in a Cleveland record store. "I started a column where I reviewed the movies that were going to be on local television, a combination of horror, science-fiction, rock'n'roll, and other bizarre types, just like in my *Psychotronic* stuff now." Moving to New York City in 1980, he expanded his *CLE* column into a weekly newsletter. "[It was] a small, photocopied, hand-lettered, alternate TV guide, which I called *Psychotronic*. It was crude. It was totally done on the sly at *The*

Village Voice at night. I had to get the information, most of the time, from *TV Guide*, and it was done in an extreme rush, because it had to get out to people, subscribers and stores, so that it could be useful for them for the following week. So, a lot of them were literally done overnight, and there was a lot of long, sleepless nights, getting that out just about every week for almost a year. Again, that was what was on in the New York area that I felt was interesting. It gave all kinds of information and positive reviews that the local newspapers or *TV Guide* never would. It was kind of a joke at the time that so many people looked at, say, *The New York Times*, to see what was on television; and the kind of movies I care about—they would either just make a little one-liner joke about how bad it was, or it would frequently say 'Not reviewed,' be-

cause they felt that those movies were beneath them. So, I was taking the position that I'm going to highlight the stuff that they think is deplorable or forgettable or horrible, and that was fun; it worked out very well."

While Weldon's weekly *Psychotronic* only applied to the New York metro area, it received some notice in the press and attracted subscribers from other states. This led to a contract at Ballantine Books to write *The Psychotronic Encyclopedia of Film*. "There was just no way I could keep up that weekly publication and do a book at the same time, so I reluctantly had to stop the weekly," he lamented. The first book was written by Weldon with the help of former *Fangoria* editor Bob Martin, and Weldon's Cleveland friend Charlie Beasley. "[Charlie] really knew about some very obscure, barely released movies, and had kind of made an art of catching the most obscure movies on late-night TV in different cities he had visited. Charlie also helped with a lot of the research, because we spent a lot of time at the Lincoln Center Film Library, researching movies that we didn't know anything about and that hadn't really been written about before. So, there were a lot of ones in there that we had no way of seeing at the time, and some of them there's still no way to see, but we did research so that we could include them. There were a lot of movies in that book that I was reviewing from childhood memory, you know. Things that I had seen ten or even twenty years earlier. *The Psychotronic Encyclopedia* was done before practically everybody had VCRs, including me; I had never even seen cable television yet, so that book was research, memory, and the more recent movies at the time."

Weldon's first book was a hit with genre fans, and has garnered praise from the likes of John Waters (*PINK FLAMINGOS*), Clive Barker (*HELLRAISER*), Karen Black (*INVADERS FROM MARS*), and Quentin Tarantino (*PULP FICTION*). "People seemed to like it," he said of the initial reaction to its publication, "and I think part of it was that I'm definitely one of the first people to kind of drop the barriers that had been and, in some cases still are there, with publications that either do just horror or just science-fiction or just rock 'n' roll. It just seemed natural to me that all of these should be together; in fact, it's frequently impossible to say that this feature is one genre or another, because so many of them cross over."

After *The Psychotronic Encyclopedia's* release, Weldon freelanced for various video magazines before launching his own periodical in 1989. He edits each issue of *Psychotronic Video* himself, with the help of his wife, Mia, and writes the

continued on page 60

VIDEO GUIDE

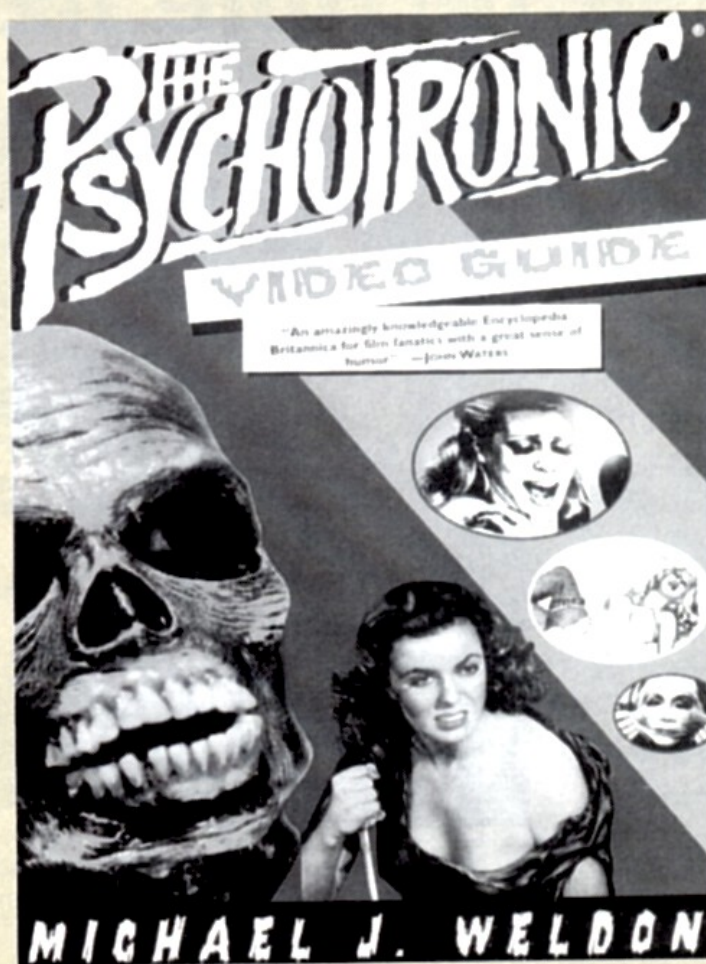
A fascinating companion piece to Weldon's original.

When *The Psychotronic Encyclopedia of Film* was published in 1983, exploitation film worship was still in its infancy. Over the years, Michael J. Weldon's book became the Bible of B-movie aficionados, and he followed up with the quarterly *Psychotronic Video* magazine. A champion of the bizarre and quirky, Weldon has immeasurably helped expand the "cult movie" cult. He has enthusiastically endorsed the home video releases of so-called lost films, many of which were, frankly, deserving of their obscurity. Still, *The Psychotronic Encyclopedia of Film* was the best

source for information on films only half-remembered after a single viewing at the drive-in, local grindhouse, or on late-night TV.

Now, after thirteen years and countless "me, too!" books, *The Psychotronic Video Guide* (St. Martin's Griffin, New York 646 pp. \$29.95) is Weldon's all-new companion. Over 9,000 titles are reviewed, with more than 450 b&w movie stills and ads illustrating the volume. Weldon excluded many of the titles already reviewed in his first book, but if there have been any new developments—restorations, directors' cuts videos, etc.—then he's included them here. For instance, 1931's *DRACULA* starring Bela Lugosi, reviewed in *The Psychotronic Encyclopedia*, isn't reviewed here, but the Spanish version shot on the same sets is, because it wasn't released on video until 1992. Biker films, old multi-chapter serials, blaxploitation movies, teen sex comedies, and even road-show burlesque shorts are critiqued in Weldon's concise and witty style, often with far more respect than the casual viewer might grant them.

The Psychotronic Video Guide is just as fascinating as the original, but is an even more in-



This follow-up to *The Psychotronic Encyclopedia of Film*, contains over 9000 new reviews of horror, science-fiction, and exploitation titles.

teresting gauge of what film sub-genres have grown in popularity over the past decade. Many of these listings are devoted to silent "classics" only recently released on video, such as the lesser-known films of Lon Chaney, Sr (regrettably, *LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT* remains lost). There are Hong Kong action films, Japanese anime, Italian giallo, "nudie cuties," and even the disturbingly macabre works of Brazilian filmmaker Jose Mojica Martins (a.k.a. "Coffin Joe").

On a personal level, I finally have a film book that proves the Mexican-lensed Little Red Riding

Hood series (1959's *LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD* and *LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD AND HER FRIENDS*, 1960's *LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD AND THE MONSTERS*, and the unreleased-in-the-U.S. *CAPERUCETUS TRES AMIGOS*) wasn't just a childhood delusion! Wherever possible, Weldon also provides information on laserdisc and film soundtrack releases.

For self-described film nerds and B-movie geeks, *Video Guide* is a godsend. Besides using the book to settle arguments, it can also start them. When I read the entry for *ANGEL HEART* to a friend ("For a modern horror movie, this has a complex plot and great atmosphere, but it's no classic."), did I ever get an earful! But that's typical of Weldon's appeal as a critic, and one of the better aspects of both *Psychotronic* books. Weldon has thus far avoided going online, a refreshing conceit in this age of www.anything&everything.com, but it's likely that the vast outpouring of "Psychotronic" movies will make *The Psychotronic Video Guide* just as obsolete as last year's *TV Guide Fall Preview* issue all too soon.

Dan Cziraky

THE LOST WORLD

CGI and robotics combine to bring those terrible lizards back to life.

There is a belief that a battle is under way in filmmaking: traditional special effects versus computer generated imagery. Nothing could be further from the truth. If anything, they are a close team. In **THE LOST WORLD: JURASSIC PARK**, Dennis Murren oversaw CGI, and Stan Winston handled the physical effects. Both had one goal, according to Winston: "We're not creating effects," he said. "We're creating actors."

For Winston, this has always been a goal. "I was inspired by a number of people," he said. "Definitely I was inspired by Ray Harryhausen, but I was also inspired by Spencer Tracy playing Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and Charles Laughton playing the Hunchback of Notre Dame. I was inspired by great performances of fantastic characters. Those performances have been created by effects artists, by actors, and by great filmmakers."

Both Winston and Murren worked on the first **JURASSIC PARK**, a film which set new standards for dinosaur performances on screen. The question, then, was: What did they hope to accomplish that they hadn't the first time around? Well, there are new dinosaurs—including a family of tyrannosaurs (papa, moma, and baby), a pachycephalosaurus, a dead parasaurolophus, and an adult and baby stegosaurus.

"It's more; it's bigger; and it's better!" enthused Winston, with a laugh. "The question always comes to me: After you do **JURASSIC PARK**, how can



One of Stan Winston's 15,000-pound live-action tyrannosaurs bears down on Ian Malcolm (Jeff Goldblum) and Sarah Harding (Julianne Moore).

you top it? Well—we did! Everything we did actually surpassed, technically and artistically and from a performance standpoint, what we did on **JURASSIC PARK**—new dinosaurs, new technology of how to get performance out of these dinosaurs."

Murren added, "Since the beginning of the show, we were wondering: What should we do? And people ask me, 'Why do you want to do that movie? You've already done it! How can you do it better than you did before?' Whenever I hear that, I figure we're onto something, because nobody can figure it out. So I spent a few months thinking, before we even got started trying to figure out what the next step would be, so it would look different and not be the same movie over again. It

shouldn't look like a **JURASSIC PARK** sequel. So that's what the goal was. Technically speaking, we have refinements in the look of the animals: skin, muscles, how the light hits them and things like that. We've got more complex and subtle performances from the animals."

A computerized image spoken of like an actor? That's the level of technology now available. Murren explained that, on the **JURASSIC PARK**, "we actually didn't know if we could pull it off as we were doing it [on **LOST WORLD**]. It was so new to us. We now know we can do it, so we're pushing the aesthetic way beyond what we did in the first show: the shot design, the camera moves, the motions of the animals—all that stuff you would do after you've

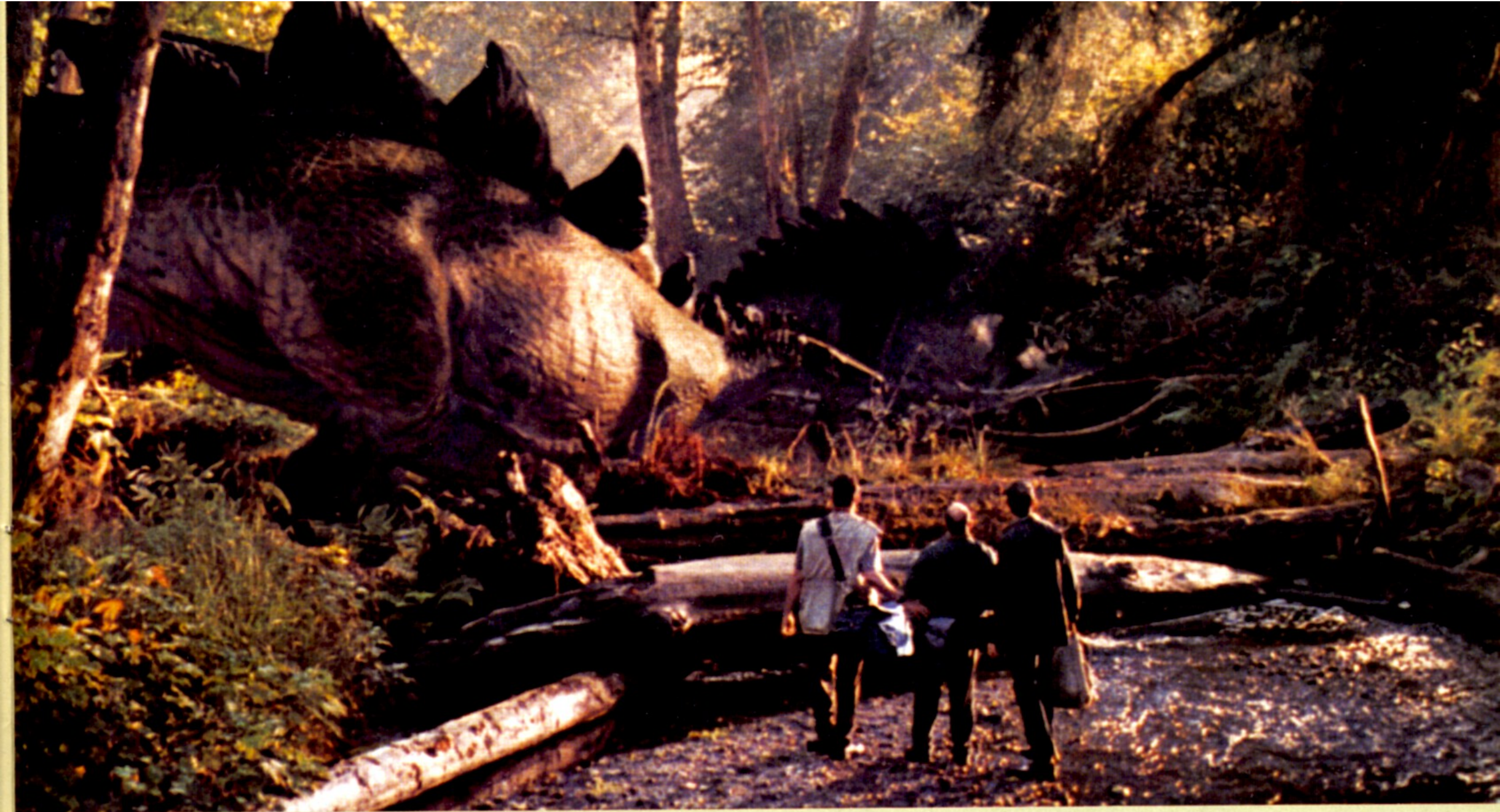
made some of these dinosaur movies and you want to do something different."

Winston estimated that "in **JURASSIC PARK**, 65% of the movie was live. If you can do it live, you do it live. That's always the way we go into it. Our live action dinosaurs are the state-of-the-art technology when it comes to robotics today. People don't realize that the robotic aspect of puppeteering and performance has been improving year-by-year, technically paralleling what's happening with animation. And our art is being enhanced by CGI."

But in terms of cost, how does CGI compare with modeling? "You can get more shots from a model," Murren explained. "But they may not be as interesting to look at as CGI. What the audience responds to these days is something they've never seen before, and that comes from CG. So you've got your choice when you're going to make a movie. You can say you're going to do it cheaply, and it'll probably show on the screen. It'll show up because the monster's in the dark most of the time. The shots are cut really short because they didn't work. You can get your shots cheaply, and that's one way to make a movie. The other way to make a movie is to give the audience something they haven't seen before. You spend money on it, and what you get back are \$900 million grosses. But the costs are also relative to the complexity, the requirements of the shot."

"If you saw the first show,

By Chuck Wagner



Top, right: Goldblum, Vince Vaughn and Richard Schiff watch stegosauri cross a river. Bottom: dino hunters attempt to capture a live specimen.

you saw a lot of CGI in that,” Murren continued. “It may have just struck you like, ‘What am I looking at?!’ A lot of the shots that you responded to were ones we’d done. The reason it was so shocking was that you’d never seen it before. It wasn’t anything thing that you could get as an incremental advance in existing technology. It took a whole new technology to get it—CG.”

Has this new technology rendered old-fashioned model work obsolete? “I think some people would like that, but I think it would be a big mistake,” said Murren. “There’s a real advantage to having a model for the shots that they work on. You don’t want to get a model out there and have it not work. But if it does work, for whatever it’s supposed to do, there’s an advantage to having it in the scene, too.”

Making the models work on screen has been aided by several advances in technology that have helped animatronics keep pace with CGI. Advanced micro-machines, robots driven by software (or by actors whose performances can be stored for easy repeating), seamless inter-





THE LOST WORLD features some new dinosaurs: here a herd of poisonous comsognathusi (sort of like piranha on land) pursue a hapless victim.

weaving of robotic actors and CGI—these are some of the advances currently in use in Winston's shop. The full-scale adult T-Rex models, weighing in at 15,000 pounds, were constructed at an estimated cost of \$1-million apiece and required up to ten puppeteers, assisted by computer programming, to operate them. "It's across the board," said Winston of the technological advances that bring the beast to life. "It's in everything we do. It's the finessing of signals from performer to performance. That is, the electronic interface between the performer and the acting dinosaur—the tolerances to which the machine is built, giving the robot the ability to move fast and dynamic and yet also get very subtle actions. We can get an organic, smooth performance and have the power that's needed to give that performance speed and dynamism and the subtlety of electronic control which allows you to take that performance down to very small, subtle moves that are extremely dramatic. Put it all together and you come up with a character. The perfect example, of course, is the T-Rex. It can

look you eye-to-eye; carry on a very small, subtle performance; and then immediately rip the shit out of everything."

How is the choice made of which technique to use for a given shot? "It's largely what the director feels," Murren explained. "If he can shoot the sequence and get the robotic characters to work and look good, then he'll try to use those. Because they're on the set. The actors can see them. The cameraman can light for them. Everybody can see them. It's when you get into complex performances, or seeing an entire creature walking on screen for ten seconds or more—

an elaborate performance—that you go to CGI."

So there is still a place for live-action effects, even in this digital age. More important, a careful fusion of animatronics and CGI can create results difficult or impossible to achieve with either one alone. "When you designed the shots and sequences," Murren said, "if you could use robotics, you used them. Then if you get something that can't be done with robotics, you go CG. But you don't throw out one for the other. It's a mixture of them that looks so striking. I think you get a better movie with a mix-

ture of the two."

On this, Stan Winston is in perfect agreement with Murren. "The true magic of what we create with film today is the seamless blend between the real world—the live-action world—and the CG world," said Winston. "If in fact in the CG world you can do what we can't do in the live world, that is enhancing what you believe you're watching us do. And if what you're watching us do is somehow slightly more real and in your face than what you can do in the CG world, we're enhancing what you can do in the CG world. So these two technologies coming together create a seamless blend, and in fact then the audience is no longer looking at technology. You're looking at the live dinosaur, because you don't ever really know how it's done. You look at it and you go, 'That couldn't be CG!' or 'That couldn't be live!' and then you forget about it because it's bouncing back and forth, shot to shot, sometimes within the same shot. Part of the shot is live, part CG. Then another shot is totally CG. Then another one is totally live. And it all looks the same." □

Stan Winston's live-action triceratops makes an unexpected visit to his captor's tent.



CINEMA

By Steve Biodrowski

THE LOST WORLD: JURASSIC PARK *Spielberg's dino-sequel is just another walk in the park.*

It was easy to imagine a sequel to JURASSIC PARK, since the film omitted many memorable set pieces from Michael Crichton's novel; all that was needed was some plot device to get the characters back on the island. However, this method was rendered unnecessary when Crichton wrote his own sequel, *The Lost World*. Based upon this book, which does a fine job of creating a new story, the film had a good chance of standing on its own. Unfortunately, director Steven Spielberg and screenwriter David Koepp adopted the former method as much as the latter in making *THE LOST WORLD: JURASSIC PARK*. Although it borrows plot elements, scenes, and (sometimes composite) characters from its namesake novel, the film is essentially a grab bag of sequences tied together by a minimal storyline that allows several abandoned scenes from the first book to reach the screen.

Koepp's script is clunky in linking these scenes together, and requires a surprising amount of leaden exposition just to jump start the story. Crichton's novel was structured as a mystery, which gradually revealed the connection between the Lost World and Jurassic Park; the film explains everything thing up front, which doesn't leave much story to tell.

As a director, Spielberg again proves his inconsistency. Four years after the double triumph of JURASSIC PARK and SCHINDLER'S LIST, he has turned in a derivative film that features some dynamic staging but also betrays his penchant for inappropriate cuteness. He knows how to generate adult-frightening thrills; but in a sop to family audiences, he can't resist having an adolescent gymnast dispatch a velociraptor with a flying kick from impromptu parallel bars—a moment worthy of a Disney kiddie flick. At least the film has one grisly glimmer of black humor: a family sees their pet's dog house dangling by a chain from the T-Rex's mouth—the dog presumably being at the other end of the chain. (Now, if only the unfortunate pup had been named Rex!)

This is not to say that the film has nothing to recommend it. The dinosaurs, as envisioned here, are such magnificent animals that it is



Survivors of the two groups on the Island, hunters and scientists, are pursued by an unhappy tyrannosaurus parent.

impossible to be bored. As before, Dennis Muren and Stan Winston's visual effects (augmented by marvelous sound work) achieve equal levels of awe, beauty, and terror. Human characterization is serviceable, but the cast work overtime to imbue some humanity into the underwritten roles. In particular, Jeff Goldblum brings an eccentricity to Dr. Ian Malcolm that goes a long way toward keeping the character alive, even though his function has been seriously diminished from the novel (in which he solved the riddle of the Lost World's existence). His asides and comments even help gloss over some plot devices, as the character continually comments on the recklessness of what's happening (which is of course contrived in order to get dino-bait to the island).

Although JURASSIC PARK gave only a Cliff Notes summary of Chaos Theory, that was better than what we get here. All Crichton's theorizing about the cause of extinction has been dropped, rather than condensed. Instead, the film offers weakly developed notions of parental love and conservationism (the latter is somewhat hypocritical coming from Spielberg, whose DreamWorks compa-

ny is planning to pave over a large area of wetlands in Playa Vista to build a studio).

The "Save the Dinos" attitude is disappointing, because the film actually seems to be onto something when hunters and scientists first confront each other (Pete Postlethwaite even manages to make something out of his character, the big game hunter with dreams of taking down the world's most fearsome predator). But this conflict is short circuited by the dinosaurs, who eat the characters before their philosophical differences can reach any dramatic resolution. Likewise, having an adult T-Rex rescue its captured offspring from civilization is interesting—we're supposed to admire the creature's devotion even as we fear its attacks—but this San Diego sequence seems tacked on (it is—the scene is not in the book) rather than climactic.

But the script really isn't the problem. What is lacking here is not so much plot as mythic undertones. What was needed was more visual imagination to make the impact of these scenes truly memorable. Even a scenario of fairy tale simplicity can stir up considerable artistic power through clever im-

agery: King Kong's ascent up the Empire State Building is a good example; an even better one in this context is the climax of GORG0, in which icons of the patriarchal British Empire (London Bridge, Big Ben, etc) fall before a monster's maternal rampage.

Unfortunately, San Diego hasn't many memorable icons to destroy. In any case, Spielberg keeps the angry Rex confined to suburbia. The sight of this Saurian striding down the night-time streets is worth the price of admission, but it's not enough to elevate the film to classic status. The sequence also betrays the weakness of computer-generated imagery, which cannot achieve the kind of full-scale destruction possible with miniatures. These new dinosaurs are far more interactive than the ones in JURASSIC PARK, and they do a nice job of smashing through windows and tearing up hapless humans, but you're not going to see toppling buildings and massive explosions. You might be better off watching GORG0 again. At least that entertaining 1960 effort expanded mother love to Godzilla-sized proportions for a truly stunning climactic confrontation. □

In this "L.A. Story," Sin City gets what it deserves.

VOLCANO

A 20th Century-Fox release of a Shuler Donner/Donner and Moritz original production. Directed by Mick Jackson. Produced by Neal H. Moritz, Andrew Z. Davis. Executive producer, Lauren Shuler Donner. Director of photography: Theo van de Sande. Editors: Michael Tronick, Don Brochu. Sound: (Dolby) Jim Tanenbaum. Production designer: Jackson DeGovia. Art directors: Scott Rittenour, Tom Reta, William Cruse, Donald Woodruff. Set designers: Patty Klavonn, Richard Reynolds, Dianne Wager, Les Gobreuegge, Beverly Eagen, Richard Lawrence. Set decoration K.C. Fox. Visual effects supervisor: Mat Beck. Special effects coordinators: Marty Bresin, Clay Pinney. Special visual effects: VIFX. Digital Visual effects: Light Matters/P.O.P. Film/Digiscopes/the Digital Magic Co. Action miniatures: Stirber Visual Network. Miniature effects supervisor/camera: David Drzewiecki. Screenplay by Jerome Armstrong & Billy Ray, based on a story by Armstrong. 3/97, 102 mins. Rating: PG-13.

Mike Roark.....Tommy Lee Jones
Dr. Amy Barnes.....Anne Heche
Kelly Roark.....Gaby Hoffman
Emmit Reese.....Don Cheadle
Dr. Jaye Calder.....Jacqueline Kim
Lt. Ed Fox.....Keith David
Norman Calder.....John Corbett
Gator Harris.....Michael Rispoli
Stan Olber.....John Carroll Lynch

by Steve Biodrowski

You have to give VOLCANO credit for resolving the great hypocritical stumbling block of most disaster epics: the vicarious thrill of witnessing the spectacular destruction, juxtaposed with the need to cheer for the heroes and hope they survive. VOLCANO is founded on the premise that audiences specifically want to see Los Angeles receive some kind of comeuppance of Biblical proportions: *Woe, woe unto thee, O thou modern Babylon, who has made all the cities taste the poisoned wine of her lewdness.* Or, in modern parlance: *Take that L.A.—you deserve it!*

If that's the starting point, then the question becomes: How can the film engage the audience on



Spectacular effects enhance VOLCANO, but the real entertainment comes from seeing familiar L.A. icons like the Angelyne billboard (inset) being trashed.



even the most basic level, when we're not supposed to be horrified but overjoyed at seeing the city leveled? The answer in this case is that the filmmakers have cleverly distinguished between the city and the citizens. When Anne Heche's geologist, upon finding that L.A.'s subway tunnels are channeling the lava and making it impossible to contain, states that the city is "finally paying for its arrogance," the response is a round of applause from L.A. viewers, because no sensible resident of this city is stupid enough to think that building a

subway in Earthquake Central is a good idea; it's something that's been foisted on us by the city government. In effect, the stupid Los Angeles, the one fashioned by the greedy, the corrupt, and the outright stupid, is being wiped away. What's left will be a city for those who actually live here.

Not that this idea is advanced with an entirely straight face. The film has its tongue firmly in cheek, as far as satirizing the city by destroying it. Only towards the end do the heroics become overly melodramatic, and the quaint notion of common adversity overcoming personal differences (in this case racial animosity between the LAPD and black citizens) is advanced with cloying sincerity. To drive the point home, the film even includes Randy Newman's "I Love L.A." over the closing credits, as a kind of coded disclaimer, emphasizing that the destruction is all in good fun and the filmmakers don't really hate Los Angeles.

But this descent into conventional melodramatics comes too late to ruin the film, which by this time has worked hard to earn audience forgiveness on the point. In this sense, VOLCANO does fall short of Tim Burton's riotous MARS ATTACKS, which refused to include any of the conventional pleasures one expects from this kind of big-budget entertainment.

The compromise somewhat lessens the effectiveness of VOLCANO, which could have implied its message, rather than announcing it.

Still, there is much to enjoy here. Brit director Mick Jackson, not being a native, perhaps has the right perspective on which parts of this town deserve to be smashed. Although this is definitely no auteur piece, it does counterbalance in interesting ways with L.A. STORY, another stylized and exaggerated view of the City of Angels. Even if the destruction of unwanted L.A. icons (e.g., billboards of the ubiquitous Angelyne and the car of unemployed would-be actor Dennis Woodruff) is not your idea of a great time, Tommy Lee Jones' matter-of-fact delivery goes a long way towards making the events seem believable, and even the obligatory but (thankfully) restrained flirtatious bantering between him and the appealing Heche comes across well. Without ever stopping for intrusive character moments, the script (by Jerome Armstrong and Billy Ray) reveals its characters through their actions in time of crisis. In particular, Jones' almost obsessive take on his character's need to confront and conquer the disaster at hand is pleasantly reminiscent of "Lennigen vs the Ants"—another man vs. nature story featuring an implacable,

continued on page 60

Tommy Lee Jones and Anne Heche follow the trail of a river of lava coursing through L.A.'s storm sewers and threatening to erupt into a volcano.



FILM RATINGS

- Must see
- Excellent
- Good
- Mediocre
- Fodder for MST-3K

THE SHINING

Director: Mick Garris. Writer: Stephen King. ABC-TV, 4/97. Six hrs w/ commercials. With: Steven Weber, Rebecca DeMornay, Courtland Mead, Melvin Van Peebles.

Stanley Kubrick distilled much of Stephen King's novel for his 1980 film, which remains technically brilliant but narratively thin. Director Mick Garris, working from a King script, brought the story back to the tale of madness and haunting that remains one of the prolific author's best works. Having time to follow the novel more closely, the six-hour mini-series shows the strengths of King's storytelling while also showcasing the limitations of commercial television. Part one focuses on the Torrance family as they come to the Overlook Hotel in the mountains of Colorado to caretake for the winter. The Overlook is an old structure that holds much of its shady history in its rooms and corridors. Part two shows the spirits getting more overt as they slowly establish their control over the weak-willed father. Part three delivers the pitch, with all hell breaking loose: Dad is fully possessed by the spirits and is instructed to kill the boy who, unbeknownst to him, is the real target of the ghostly onslaught. His psychic abilities will make them stronger than ever.

The tele-version has the time to tell the tale of the family falling apart. Garris shows himself to be a fine director in the making, but working in the constraints of network television cost him: part three, which should have been the most unnerving and most powerful, drags as Weber, in full possession and wielding a croquet mallet, talks more than acts on his threats. A half hour to 45 minutes could have been lost to the betterment of the project's suspense, but that would have played hell with network timing, wouldn't it? Weber and DeMornay are fine actors separately, but they don't make a believable couple here. As Jack Torrance, this could be a breakout performance for an actor who has been the goofy brother on a sitcom for several years; Weber's talent is impressive, a joy to watch, and DeMornay's Wendy is more suited to the persona of the novel. As little Danny, Courtland Mead carries the day just fine, whether in a psychic stupor, a catatonic state, or in abject defiance of the horror around him. Although this version of *THE SHINING* does not quite hit the ball all the way out of the park, it is a far better interpretation of a literary source material, utilizing not only technique but the basic elements of storytelling and coherency that were missing from the feature.

●●● Frederick C. Szebin

TELEVISION

by Frederick C. Szebin

As a quick introduction, the purpose of this rant from the wilds of Pennsylvania is to give me a valid reason to sit and stare at science fiction, fantasy, and horror television all week long and toss out my strictly personal comments while getting paid for it. It just proves that every once in a while, we live long enough to look on those who derided our choice of lifestyle—in this case, the fact that I know the *TV Guide* better than I know the *Bible*—and say, "HA!" So pay attention, fanboys. This is the reward of wasted youth.

Let's start with the familiar, like *THE X-FILES*, just to establish my grading curve. What more is there to say about this show (that won't be said in more depth in *CFQ*'s episode guide later this year)? Well, as a watcher since episode one, I increasingly get the feeling that the conspiracy of silence that is the show's *raison d'être* has got to break in some way to keep the series from stagnating. But just when I think the concept has run its course, out comes a great two-parter or even a single episode that gives a twist, a death of a recurring character, or a fresh spin on an old concept—something that renews my faith in the show and proves that series TV isn't the beaten horse I once thought it to be.

Going from the old to the new brings us to *MILLENNIUM*. Like most of you, I was highly awaiting what horrors and mysteries of the human condition Chris Carter could possibly conjure up after *THE X-FILES*. And I was hooked

Although often engrossing, *MILLENNIUM* has fallen into the trap of being a "serial killer of the week show," despite Chris Carter's promise to the contrary.



WATCHER IN THE WOODS

Keeping an eye on genre TV



Although yet to reach a wider audience, the bold story arc of *BABYLON 5* continues to unfold as a richly detailed action-adventure of epic proportions.

until about the third episode, when I realized that, despite Mr. Carter's promise, the show really is a serial killer of the week program. I will not criticize the unrelentingly bleak (did I say "bleak"?—that's like saying Michael Jackson is "different") outlook. Texture is so rare in our entertainment today. Carter should be commended for creating worlds that excite as well as disgust. But with *MILLENNIUM*, there is no discerning nature to the individual episodes, which makes it a failure overall.

Such cannot be said for another producer who has yet to receive due notice, J. Michael Straczynski.

With *BABYLON FIVE*, Straczynski has taken on a brave and bold five year experiment and enveloped the icons of science fiction in stories: tales of love, betrayal, joy, loss, race hatred, self-loathing, and even a little old-fashioned action-adventure—all in a story arc so involved, so detailed and rich, that the reason the show has yet to be embraced on a larger scale is that anyone coming in during the third or fourth seasons is bound to feel lost and confused.

But the joy in *BABYLON FIVE* comes in staying with it and watching it unfold, watching the main characters change over the course of several episodes and watching the 24th century social and political structure as it develops with all the violence, passion, and fury such a process must endure. Not all the episodes are winners; the build-up to the Shadow War was much more exciting than its rather anti-climactic denouement, but it was one hell of a ride while it lasted. And the end of that war did not bring peace but yet another storyline of deceit, suspense, and socio-political uncertainty. *BABYLON FIVE* is a classically-conceived epic in a B-movie era, undeserving of its mere cult status.

On the other end of science-fiction is fantasy, and there's plenty out there these days: *HERCULES*, *THE EPIC JOURNEYS*; *XENA*, *WARRIOR PRINCESS*; *THE ADVEN-*

TURES OF SINBAD; even old, reliable TARZAN. All have been slashing, slugging, and swinging across the ether lately, all in tribute in some form or another to the lovely old movies of Ray Harryhausen, who helped raise more of us than he'll ever suspect. But there's nothing out there that is really worthy of passing the mantle. The best of fantasy TV these days, HERCULES and XENA, still can be quite mediocre. I don't expect florid, ancient dialogue from their mouths, but when a Greek goddess trumpets, "Bitchin'!" I must give a shudder. What HERCULES and XENA really lack is guts, a little darkness. I understand that Xena is trying to atone for her former warrior ways, but a woman who has stood hip-deep in the blood of her enemies—as I suppose she has at some point or another—just isn't believable as a PC princess.

I applaud XENA's success in giving young girls a hero to idolize, in giving women a champion worth cheering. HERCULES still has the best fight choreography ever put to film; each series' performers are enjoyable to watch; and I'd probably get a kick out of having a nosh with any of them. But it's okay to take off the gloves once in a while and not be *sooo* polite in your war against evil.

SINBAD. Wow. Or should I say, "Ow!" HERCULES and XENA have begot a bastard son, and he's not half the man his mom and pop are on their worst days. CGI, beautiful women, good-looking guys in every episode. And not much else.

On the contemporary front, the most pleasant surprise in genre TV this season has been BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER, based on the so-so feature film. Scripter Joss Whedon is the executive producer, and he has done a fine job expanding his original premise to a weekly format. Buffy is not only a vampire slayer, but a slayer of all that is evil, and there is plenty of that, because her home town was built over a Hell Mouth, a dimensional doorway to the Bad Place that attracts all sorts of naughty things.

The production values are good, with some fun CGI effects. Particularly high on the "gee whiz" scale is the vampire death: once staked, they hit the ground and turn into a drifting powder before our eyes. The cast is charming and likable: Sarah Michelle Gellar, who won a Daytime Emmy in 1994 for ALL MY CHILDREN, is drop-dead pretty, with an array of short skirts and tight tops guaran-



Joss Whedon's **BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER**, developed from the 1992 feature film he scripted, is the most pleasant genre surprise of the TV season.

teed to draw out the evil in any red-blooded American male. Alyson Hannigan, Nicholas Brendon, and Anthony Stewart Head seem to enjoy the off-beat lines they are given, and that sense of fun helps the proceedings to be enjoyable, whether they are taking on the Vampire King known as The Master, or pheromone-spewing giant mantises, or cheerleading witches, or God knows whatever else emerging from the mouth of Hell. If you haven't caught the show yet, your first episode may be a bit confusing, because the storyline is cumulative; but stick with it, and you could discover the best horror series since THE X-FILES.

Speaking of horror on television, I would like to comment on THE OUTER LIMITS. Although science fiction, the original series had a strong overlay of Gothic imagery; almost any episode would be perfect for Halloween. The new series is more polished, probably has more money per episode, and seems to be trying real hard. Occasionally, it scores. But for every episode featuring Robert Patrick (TERMINATOR 2's T-1000)—and I've seen him in two so far that left me feeling genuinely creeped out despite their telegraphed endings—there is something like the episode with Alyssa Milano, a thoroughly turgid story involving a sex monster. Never mind. I will say that even the soundtrack of that episode seemed impressed with Milano's breasts (as well it should be). One thing the new show has that the original didn't is a lax censor. Blood, gore, and nu-

dity can be interspersed freely in stories that might not really need them. The show is also in syndication, censored for your protection. From what I've seen so far, you're not missing much that Showtime offers its paying audience. As Straczynski knows, but so few others seem to suspect, it's the tale and its telling that really matter. While purveyors of televised *cine-fantastique* may be getting better at it than in past days, there's still a long way to go.

By the way, those days of past genre ineptitude are being kept alive on Sci-Fi Channel by MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000. The show doesn't miss a beat after its hiatus. Returning from their out-of-body excursion at the end of their run on Comedy Central last season, the crew of the Satellite of Love find themselves 500 years in the future and in the very same predicament they left behind. Mike and the 'bots now have to deal with Dr. Clayton Forrester's mom, who survived the past half millennium to continue her son's torture of the SOL crew by sending them bad movies.

The jokes are as fast and furious as before, which makes repeat viewings a pleasant must. Universal has opened their vaults, with an occasional offering from AIP. This gives us a chance to see such faux-classics as REVENGE OF THE CREATURE and I WAS A TEENAGE WEREWOLF in the only way they should be seen, with tongue firmly in cheek and pleasant company that makes the viewing experience of such things a joy to behold. □

BORDERLAND

EIGHT HEADS IN A DUFFEL BAG

Director-writer: Thomas Schullman. Orion Pictures, 4/97. PG-13. With: Joe Pesci, George Hamilton, Kirsty Swanson, Dyan Cannon.

This misfired black comedy marks an inauspicious directorial debut from the writer of the excellent DEAD POET'S SOCIETY. The plot involves a mob bagman (Pesci, sending up his GOODFELLAS persona) transporting eight human heads—proof that a hit has been executed. Needless to say the duffel bag is mistakenly exchanged with another at the airport, and hilarity allegedly ensues as Pesci tracks down the heads. Toward the end, Schullman tosses in a Romero-esque sequence: a dream in which the heads come alive (singing "Mr. Sandman"!) and their decapitated bodies come crashing through the walls. It's an amusing comic nightmare, with some eye-catching imagery that the rest of the film lacks. Strangely, considering Schullman's past credit, much of the problem is not with the directing (although it's unimpressive) but with the script, which often leaves its talented cast (particularly Cannon) floundering in a visibly desperate search for laughs. ● Jay Stevenson

MIDNIGHT MOVIES

TROMEO AND JULIET

Director: Lloyd Kaufman. Writers: Kaufman & James Gunn. Troma Pictures, 11/96. With: Will Keenan, Jane Jensen, Earl McKoy.

Troma-lord Lloyd Kaufman has his own idea of fun: mostly it involves mountains of latex and oceans of Technicolor blood, blended together to form the most grotesque, entertaining configurations imaginable. In TROMEO AND JULIET, his urban-horror-slapstick retranslation of you-know-what, he adds a few more items to his repertoire, including real, on-screen nipple piercings (in glorious close-up!), rampant incest, and Skinner-box bondage. On him it looks good.

Having spent the better part of the last decade trying to recreate the serendipitous success of those gore-comedy titans, THE CLASS OF NUKE 'EM HIGH and THE TOXIC AVENGER, and winding up doing little more than proving that one can't willfully recreate the lightning-in-a-box magic of a guilty-pleasure (the sole exception: the underrated RAMBO send-up, WAR), it appears that Kaufman here has just decided to make his movie—casting the tale of star-crossed lovers (Will Keenan and Jane Jensen) amidst a war between rival pornographers Monty Que (Earl McKoy) and "Cappy" Capulet (Maximilian Shaun)—and let the cult following take care of itself. It's a smart move: TROMEO AND JULIET, gritted-up and transported to Tromaville, emerges as a raw, funny love-story-cum-splatter-pic. Choice of source material helps: not even Lloyd Kaufman dares fuck too heavily with the

Bard, and his script (with a healthy assist by co-writer James Gunn) manages to make the application of all that Tromatic mayhem to the classic story work as legitimately as anything Sondheim and Bernstein put into *WEST SIDE STORY*. Yeah, I used the word legitimate and Lloyd Kaufman in the same sentence. This keeps up, we're going to have to start treating the guy as a serious filmmaker. Isn't that one of the seven signs of the apocalypse?

●● Dan Persons

DIRECT-TO-VIDEO

DARK PLANET

Director: Albert Magnoli. EGM Film International. With: Michael York, Paul Mercurio, Harley Jane Kozak, Maria Ford.

Mutant rebel humans share an uneasy truce with their "master race" Alpha foes. A renegade astro-navigator knows of a potentially colonizable planet beyond a wormhole. These are the factions which unite on one ship for a voyage to the "dark planet" of the film's title. Getting there is all the fun with betrayal, spaceship maneuvers and gun play along the way.

If these elements suggest a familiar pastiche of science fiction, they are. But under the direction of Albert Magnoli and with the performances of "name" stars such as Michael York, Paul Mercurio, Harley Jane Kozak and John Beck—not to mention the solid work of DTV regulars like Maria Ford—the film is actually quite entertaining. Primarily set on board a spaceship, the film has a claustrophobic feel which adds to the suspense.

With good sfx and sound fx (on a budget of \$2-\$3 million) and high production values, the film is actually stronger than many a major studio product. Magnoli's use of subjective point-of-view transforms scenes which might have been trite into scenes that are visually arresting. There are occasional lapses (perhaps too many extreme close-ups, occasional dialog recording variances and overly standard gunfights), but *DARK PLANET* is a splendid time at the movies.

●●● Chuck Wagner

H.P. LOVECRAFT'S NECRONOMICON

Directors: Christophe Gans, Shusuke Kaneko, Brian Yuzna. Writers: Brent V. Friedman, Gans, Kazunori Ito. New Line Video, 12/96. 96 mins. R. With: Jeffrey Combs, Bruce Payne, Richard Lynch, David Warner, Belinda Bauer, Maria Ford, Dennis Christopher, Don Calfa, Gary Graham.

Necronomicon is the name of the legendary, much feared, impossible to attain book which features so largely in the Cthulhu Mythos of H.P. Lovecraft, who would be spinning in his grave if he saw the lurid soap opera that has been created from three of his stories. *NECRONOMICON* bears a 1993 production date, and it is not surprising it has taken so long to reach video when you see what a complete shambles the final product is.

In the first story, *THE DROWNED*, a bereaved husband and father (Lynch) is tempted to bring his beloved wife and son back from the dead by witchcraft and, of course, their bodies return



Shot as a theatrical feature, *LOCH NESS*, with Ted Danson, Kirsty Graham, and Joely Richardson (pictured above), was instead shuffled off to ABC television.

but their souls do not. The second story, *THE COLD*, is about a scientist (Warner) who has been able to stay young virtually forever through the use of the spinal fluid of unwilling victims. The third story, *WHISPERS*, is about a race of subterranean bat-like creatures. All these are linked together through a dull wraparound story in which Lovecraft himself (Combs) through subterfuge gains access to the *Necronomicon* (which seems to contain stories, not the mad ramblings of Abdhul Alhazred, and also seems to be in English instead of Arabic or Latin), and he simply reads the stories as we see them. The stories appear to be all over the map in terms of time; it is not clear exactly when they take place, except for the wraparound whose time is identified with old-fashioned automobiles.

Despite the short running time and the anthology format, the pace is unbearably slow, especially at the beginning. The effects are as badly edited and incoherent as any I've ever seen. This must be counted as virtually a tragedy when you look at the list of artists who have contributed to them: Thomas C. Rainone, John Buechler, Screaming Mad George, Steve Johnson, Everett Burrell, Bart Mixon. Mention should be made of John Vulich's makeup of Jeffrey Combs, who is virtually unrecognizable except for his voice.

● Judith P. Harris

THE LAND BEFORE TIME IV: JOURNEY THROUGH THE MIST

Director: Roy Allen Smith. Writer: Dev Ross. MCA/Universal Home Video, 11/96. G. Voices: Charles Durning, Rob Paulsen, Frank Welker.

With the original *LAND BEFORE TIME*, Don Bluth fashioned the type of universally themed classic that he had promised when leaving the Disney studio to branch out on his own. Unfortunately, MCA/Universal

has taken the characters and storyline of this original and fashioned them into a series of made-for-video quickies. These films give their intended audience instant gratification, as the limited animation allows the films to be produced faster, but they also tarnish the memory of the original.

In this third sequel (with which Bluth was not involved), talking brontosaurus Littlefoot and his dino-pals venture into the unknown, to search for a magical flower that will cure Littlefoot's ailing grandfather. The story does provide its share of close calls, as well as a duo of villains (the bizarre mismatched pair of a prehistoric crocodile and a reptilian-like bird), but never allows the humor to rise above the pre-school level. While the anima-

tion is serviceable, it's nowhere near either the quality of theatrical productions or the style of Saturday morning fare. In all, the dinosaurs in *LAND BEFORE TIME IV* are strictly for viewers who favor a species called Barney.

● Mike Lyons

MADE-FOR-TELEVISION

LOCH NESS

Director: John Henderson. Writer: John Fusco. ABC-TV, 11/96. 101 mins (2 hrs w/ commercials). With: Ted Danson, Joely Richardson, Ian Holm, Harris Yulin, Nick Brimble.

My expectations ran low for *LOCH NESS*, a film so poor it not only bypassed theatrical release but also cable to go directly to network TV. Ted Danson, having a permanent bad hair day, plays an unlikable deadbeat scientist, forced by his university to go to Loch Ness to disprove the existence of that lake's mythical underwater beast or face dismissal from his hated teaching job. He goes through the motions and, coming up empty-handed, prepares to depart. However, a 9-year-old child (Kirsty Graham) with second sight inexplicably takes a shine to him and shows him an underground cavern where a colony of creatures, a plesiosaur hybrid, lives. Will Danson expose the gentle creatures to a media circus for professional aggrandizement, or will he kill off his career entirely for the sake of the brutal and taciturn Scottish folk who have kept Nessie's secret all their lives?

LOCH NESS has one of the most ludicrously cliched plots ever seen: I'm sure if Danson had used a spaceship instead of a boat, he would have run into a meteor shower as well. There is no possible attraction to this drivel except for the creatures themselves, CGI beauties looking as real as the *JURASSIC PARK* dinos, courtesy of Jim Henson's Creature Shop. Unfortunately, they are on screen a very brief time, and it is a long, dull haul to reach them.

● Judith P. Harris

In a vintage gross-out sequence from Troma's trash take on the Bard, *TROMEO AND JULIET*, Tromeo dreams he's delivering Juliet's mutant baby.



ART HOUSE

By Dan Persons

RISKY BUSINESS:

Greenaway & Soderbergh walk tightrope with new efforts

You gotta understand: there's little risk in spending \$200 million on films that feature rampaging Schwarzeneggers, wall-to-wall CGI effects, and exploding White Houses. These projects are as much marketing commodities as works of art: between overseas sales, sell-through videos, and action-figure licensing, they are designed to turn a profit, no matter what. After all, even *WATERWORLD* wound up making money; if that isn't a tip that the studios' high-stakes gambles aren't such gambles, I don't know what is.

Now the guys below—they take risks. These are the genuine tightrope walks, representing healthy challenges for artists and audiences alike. Listen, I've no problem with the McDonald's style of corporate filmmaking—sometimes, you just gotta have a Big Mac, filmic or otherwise. But sometimes you need something more substantial, something that can be chewed on a bit before it goes down. That's what we're going to look at here: acquired tastes, maybe, but all the more appreciated for the effort they demand.

Epic in vision and intimate in presentation, *THE PILLOW BOOK* feels as if it's based on legends centuries old. In some ways it is. Director Peter Greenaway has built his original screenplay upon a cornerstone of Japanese literature: the one-thousand-year-old personal diary, or pillow book, of Sei Shonagon, a courtier of the Heian Dynasty. Taking his cue from a narrative so arcane that it may as well have been written on another planet, the director has fashioned a stylized, modern-day fable, at once regally formal yet bracingly experimental.

On her fifth birthday, young Nagiko (played at various stages of childhood by Miwako Kawai, Chizuru Ohnishi, Shiho Takmatsu, and Aki Ishimaru) witnesses her writer-calligrapher father (Ken Ogata) being sodomized by his publisher (Yoshi Oida). This event (along with two birthday traditions: the scribing onto her face of a poetic creation myth by her father and the bedtime reading by her aunt [Hideko Yoshida] of passages from *The Pillow Book*)



In Peter Greenaway's baroque *THE PILLOW BOOK*, Vivian Wu stars as Nagiko, a woman obsessed with having her skin calligraphed by her various lovers.

marks the girl permanently: she grows into adulthood (the stately, beautiful Vivian Wu) obsessed with having her skin calligraphed by her various lovers, and determined to extract her revenge upon the debauched, amoral publisher whose influence, directly and indirectly, has overshadowed her life. The plan she arrives at: scribe erotic poetry onto her lovers' bodies, and dispatch the men as living, literary submissions to her antagonist's doorstep. Once the older man begins transcribing and publishing the material, he finds himself progressively falling under Nagiko's spell: taking intellectual sustenance from the calligraphed passages, deriving physical pleasure from the medium of delivery.

Having fashioned a tale that itself pushes the bounds of baroque narrative, Greenaway heightens the effect by calling into play every facility available to the modern filmmaker. He toys with film time—interrupting his narrative with quick-cuts to the near-future or flashbacks to the distant past—and treats the screen almost literally as canvas, composing dense layouts of imagery that superimpose elegant calligraphy over matted inserts over symmetric sets. Even the subtitles, deployed only when absolutely necessary, are beautiful. It's a close to ceremonial presentation, one that, for all its exotic ele-

ments, touches at something primal and universal in the human experience (in a moment as vivid as a page out of the Brothers Grimm, Greenaway has the desperate publisher exhume one of Nagiko's dead lovers, tanning and binding the corpse's calligraphed skin so that he may possess his own "pillow book"). The whole may be too formalized and self-consciously beautiful for some viewers. Me, I'll be coming back to *THE PILLOW BOOK* often, and happily. I won't be surprised when I find something new in each screening.

SCHIZOPOLIS is a stunt, but an engaging one. Finding himself at the end of a creative tether after helming *THE UNDERNEATH*, writer-director Steven Soderbergh retreated to his home-base of Baton Rouge with a skeleton crew and a small corps of trusted actors to film this shaggy, semi-improvisatory comedy. The result falls somewhere between *Mad* magazine and *Naked Lunch*, featuring a story that has buttoned-down yes-man Fletcher Munson (Soderbergh himself) watching his marriage fall apart even as he is charged with writing the speech that will save the self-help empire of renowned Eventualism guru T. Azimuth Schwitters (Mike Malone).

That's about as clear as things get. I've left out a sub-plot that fo-

cuses on how exterminator-bedroom athlete Elmo Oxygen (David Jenson) is lured away from his supporting role in the film by an unidentified pair who think he's worthy of more exciting storylines; or the fact that some of the dialogue has been reduced to generic descriptors ("Qualified, vaguely positive reply"), or reveals the licentious reality hiding behind social pleasantries ("Is your wife coming over tonight? Because her big ass always leaves me satisfied") or is just plain gibberish ("Beef diaper?"); or that Mrs. Munson (Betsy Brantley) is cheating on her husband with an amorous dentist who happens to be played by... Steven Soderbergh, who is then swayed in his attentions by a beautiful patient played by... Betsy Brantley! Did I mention that they improvised some of this stuff?

With its satire of bland conformity and its reveling in suburban adulteries, *SCHIZOPOLIS* seems more informed by '50s milieu than contemporary media hysteria. Thing is, is the nostalgia trip necessary? Soderbergh can get away with the linguistic tricks because the sequences that feature them (wife and husband exchange pleasantries before she flees to the arms of her secret lover; sexy exterminator and lonely client flash each other less-than-subtle signals of availability) are familiar to begin with. You get the joke, but after a certain amount of this stuff (later on, the sequences are repeated, only now Soderbergh's dialogue is replaced with dubbed-in Japanese, or Italian, or French) you might begin to wonder whether, if these dramatics are such clichés, do they need to be accommodated at length? The partial answer is that, while Soderbergh is being deliberately self-indulgent (and he here gets nowhere near the hubris that resulted in *KAFKA*), he is a nimble and imaginative enough filmmaker to keep even the more obvious fillips from overstaying their welcome. *SCHIZOPOLIS* may not be the world-shattering event that Soderbergh self-mockingly proclaims it in the film's prologue (by the way, his dead-pan presence before the camera is one of the film's high-

points), but you come out of it with the definite sense that if all self-therapy was this much fun, there'd be no room on theater screens for the likes of *TWISTER*.

I thought I'd had it with *LOVE SERenade*, the 1996 Cannes Camera D'Or winner from Australia. Halfway through the thing, I wasn't even sure it was a genre film, given that its main thrust to that point seemed to be an exploration of how two man-hungry sisters go to war over their town's new disk jockey. It wasn't as if I harbored sympathy for any of the characters, either: older Vicki Ann (Rebecca Frith) throws herself at the object of her affections with a maternal desperation that's dismaying to behold (she leaves casseroles on the man's doorstep); Dimity (Miranda Otto) is all twisted-up posture and repressed emotion; their would-be paramour, Ken Sherry (George Shevstov), is an oleaginous '70s throwback who's been divorced three times, quotes passages on-air from the *Desiderata* between cuts of Barry White, and thinks nothing of turning both sisters against each other in his campaign to get them both into bed. By mid-point, both women are miserable; Ken is looking especially satisfied, and I'm about to write the whole exercise off.

Then Dimity discovers a gill behind Ken's ear, and the giant swordfish on the D.J.'s living-room wall begins writhing in disturbingly suggestive ways, and it turns out that, contrary to initial impressions, there's a cause behind writer-director Shirley Barrett's cruelties. Screw Venus and Mars, in *LOVE SERenade*, men and women barely share the same universe, and Barrett scores points in showing how her benighted heroines eventually come to a realization of Ken's tenuous humanity (in one wicked sequence, Dimity stares in awe as the D.J. brushes his teeth and foam oozes out from behind his ear). The performances hew to the farcical while still maintaining an impressive subtlety (Otto has this great, twisted-up smirk during her seduction scene that makes her look like she's eaten the last Oreo in the package and can't wait to tell somebody about it), the ending is nasty and satisfying, and the whole maintains Australia's reputation for tackling seemingly stock material in totally unexpected ways. Who thought such tropical climes could breed such dark souls? □

Apocalyptic man-machine interface

TETSUO: BODY HAMMER

Director: Shinya Tsukamoto. Producers: Fuminori Shishido, Fumio Kurokawa, Shinya Tsukamoto. Cinematographer: Shinya Tsukamoto, Fumikazu Oda, Katsunori Yokoyama. Art director: Shinya Tsukamoto. Editor: Shinya Tsukamoto. Special makeup/special effects: Takashi Oda, Kan Takahama, Akira Fukaya. Music by Chu Ishikawa. Ending theme song: Tomoyasu Hotel. Screenplay by Shinya Tsukamoto. 83 mins.

Taniguchi.....	Tomoron Taguchi
Kana.....	Nobu Kanaoka
Yatsu (The Guy).....	Shinya Tsukamoto
Minori.....	Keinosuke Tomioka
Taniguchi's father.....	Sujin Kim
Taniguchi's mother.....	Min Tanaka
Big Shinhead.....	Hideaki Tezuka
Young Skinhead.....	Tomoo Asada
Mad Scientist.....	Toraemon Utazawa

by Todd French

TETSUO: BODY HAMMER, Oriental enfant terrible Shinya Tsukamoto's latest cyberbolic riff, is, among other things, a viciously black send-up of Japan's self-image of wisteria-garden placidity, mecha-suit monster mangas, and urban angst. In **BODY HAMMER**, it's the impersonal steel facade of Tokyo that's the font for the alienating, dehumanizing forces acting upon its hapless hero. It is a more than worthy follow-up to the director's previous **TETSUO: IRON MAN**, a 1989 B&W cyberpunk shoe-stringer that blew a number of critical brain pans during its 1992 midnight release stateside.

The plot, like **IRON MAN**, is a weird and breathless filmic potpourri, combining such diverse elements as James Cameron, David Cronenberg, and of course the most campified Asian monster-royales. Tomorrow Taguchi is Taniguchi Tomoo, a happily married exec who is amnesic of his origins since age eight, although he experiences a peaceful vision of family bliss that might be a clue to



TETSUO: BODY HAMMER is Shinya Tsukamoto's color 35mm follow-up to his 16mm b/w **TETSUO: IRON MAN**.



his past. During a trip to a mall, he and his family are terrorized by a gang of body-building skin-heads led by the enigmatic Yatsu (Tsukamoto himself), who kidnap Tomoo's son in an unnerving game that sparks the enraged father's metamorphosis into a deadly cyber-weapon. When Taniguchi is kidnapped himself, the skin-head cult quickly discovers that the manifestation of his "killing magnitude" is more than they bargained for. Headed for a showdown with Yatsu and his cadre, Taniguchi is shocked to find his own identity inextricably linked with the similarly cursed mutant leader.

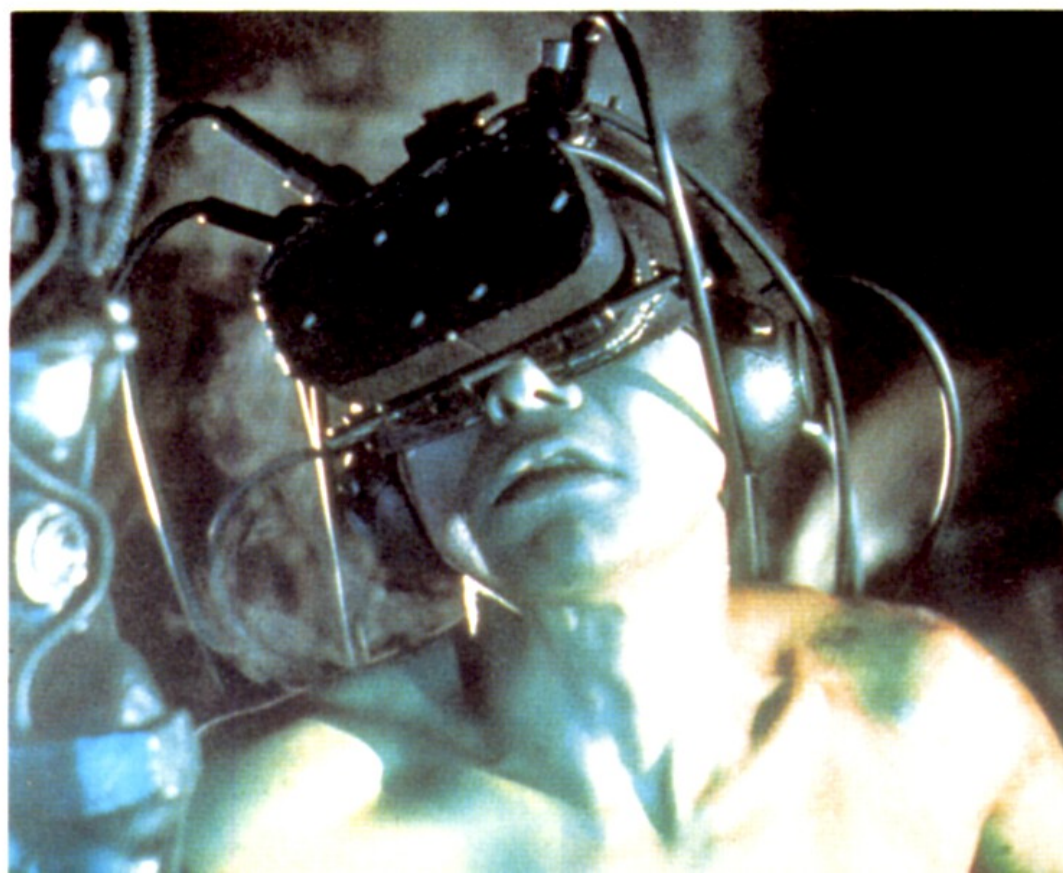
The film is less an outright sequel than a more lavish meditation

on themes from the first film. While the extra luxury is a definite assist, fans needn't despair that Tsukamoto has lost his poverty row ingenuity and frenetic power. To be sure, the narrative anchor will bug some fans of the original's free-form approach: Tsukamoto has included an (ill-advised) explanation of all the metal mania. Although it is the weakest part of **BODY HAMMER**, it does explain the bloody Oedipal-Freudian scrap heap that comes full circle by the end.

If **BODY HAMMER** doesn't boast a single image as truly outlaw as **IRON MAN**'s pivotal moment when the Salaryman's penis was transformed into a hydraulic drill, it does boast a number of sequences of indelible beauty and horror—as when a close-up of the head of Taniguchi's father being blasted into raw burger, is transformed by Tsukamoto into a piece of gory, avant-garde sculpture.

At the film's heart, however, is a simple, reactionary image: Taniguchi's recurring, nostalgic dream of nuclear family happiness, repeated in the movie's coda: After all the chaos and withering firepower, Taniguchi, his wife Kana (Nobu Kanaoka), and their (inexplicably resurrected) son walk through the now bombed-out, depopulated landscape, with Dad muttering, "Now it's peaceful." Given the film's previous, relentless onslaught of apocalyptic man-machine interface, it's a feelingly expressed sentiment. □

Tsukamoto's bio-mechanical combination of man and machine recalls everything from Cameron's **TERMINATOR** to Cronenberg's **VIDEODROME**.



Wonderfully original animated achievement

WAT'S PIG

An Aardman Animations Production Written & Directed by Peter Lord. Executive producers: Peter Lord and David Sproxton. Producers: Jo Allen, Michael Rose. Animation: Peter Lord, Samm Fell, Mike Boode. 11 mins., not rated. Screened as part of "Wallace and Gromit: the Best of Aardman Animations," 4/96.

by Michael Lyons

With its hilltop castle and a figure on horseback riding through the dark night, *WAT'S PIG* begins like a hundred other animated fairy tales. Then, the film takes you down a surprisingly different road—and one you'll be glad you took. From its original story to its innovative execution, this latest entry (and worthy Oscar nominee) from Aardman Animation more than solidifies the studio's position as a leader in independent animation.

WAT'S PIG opens with a sinister knight kidnapping identical twin baby boys. In his flight from the castle, the knight only captures one of the babies, but then drops the infant in the woods. In great mythological tradition, the babe is befriended and raised by an animal (in this case a pig). He grows up to be Wat, a simple, selfless peasant living happily in a small hovel. Meanwhile, the other brother, simply known as Earl, has grown up to be a spoiled leader.

Director Peter Lord brilliantly shows the parallel lives of the two brothers through the use of split screen. Stop-motion animation is amazing enough, but the addition of this camera trick makes *WAT'S PIG* staggering to watch, as simultaneous action happens on both sides of the screen, giving one a



Separated from his identical brother at birth, Wat lives a happy peasant life in the shadow of the castle, where unbeknownst to him his brother Earl reigns.

new respect for this arduous form of animation.

The two brothers eventually meet, after Wat is drafted and then forced to disguise himself as the Earl. It is not, however, the simple *Prince and the Pauper* tale you might be expecting, which is what makes *WAT'S PIG* so special. Like Nick Park's *WALLACE AND GROMIT* films for Aardman, this short subject ends happily, humorously, and simply, without everything tied up in a nice neat, fairy-tale bow.

Like Park, Lord has an uncanny knack for bringing the tiny, three-dimensional world to life with a

cinematic flair. Park seems to apply a Hitchcockian film-noir flavor to his short subjects, while Peter Lord, with *WAT'S PIG*, shows a grander, David Lean-esque vision. There's a Gothic, brooding aura to the opening kidnapping sequence, and a battle scene later in the film has an epic feel to it (*BRAVEHEART*, sans violence). In fact, Lord wisely shies away from any such grisly elements—close-ups of clashing flags, swords and shuffling feet are all that's shown—making the sequence far more compelling to watch.

The details of movement that Lord achieves is equally stunning: flags ripple in the wind; cloaks flap with movement; and armor clangs with tactile reality. Most importantly, *WAT'S PIG* has an overriding humorous tone that carries through the story's little touches (a draft notice features the Earl pointing, like Uncle Sam, above the declaration: "I Want Ye!"), through to the surprisingly cynical yet humorous conclusion, in which the Earl loses all and is forced to move in to Wat's hovel.

This sums up the theme of *WAT'S PIG* perfectly: fame and fortune are indeed fleeting, but life's simple pleasures will always remain. It's not a "happily ever after" message, but that's what makes *WAT'S PIG* such a wonderfully original animated achievement. □

Aardman Animations co-founder Peter Lord on his Oscar-nominated effort, *WAT'S PIG*

By Michael Lyons

A hand reaches in from the cosmos and begins to shape a human being out of clay, then places him on the surface of the Earth. Yes, this scene from Peter Lord's Oscar-nominated short subject, *ADAM*, is clearly about the world's first man, but it's also a metaphor for the animator as creator. "What you see on the screen may be fake," said Lord, "but that's the actual size of the puppet; that's how big the hand is. So, yes, the animator does do the 'God job.'"

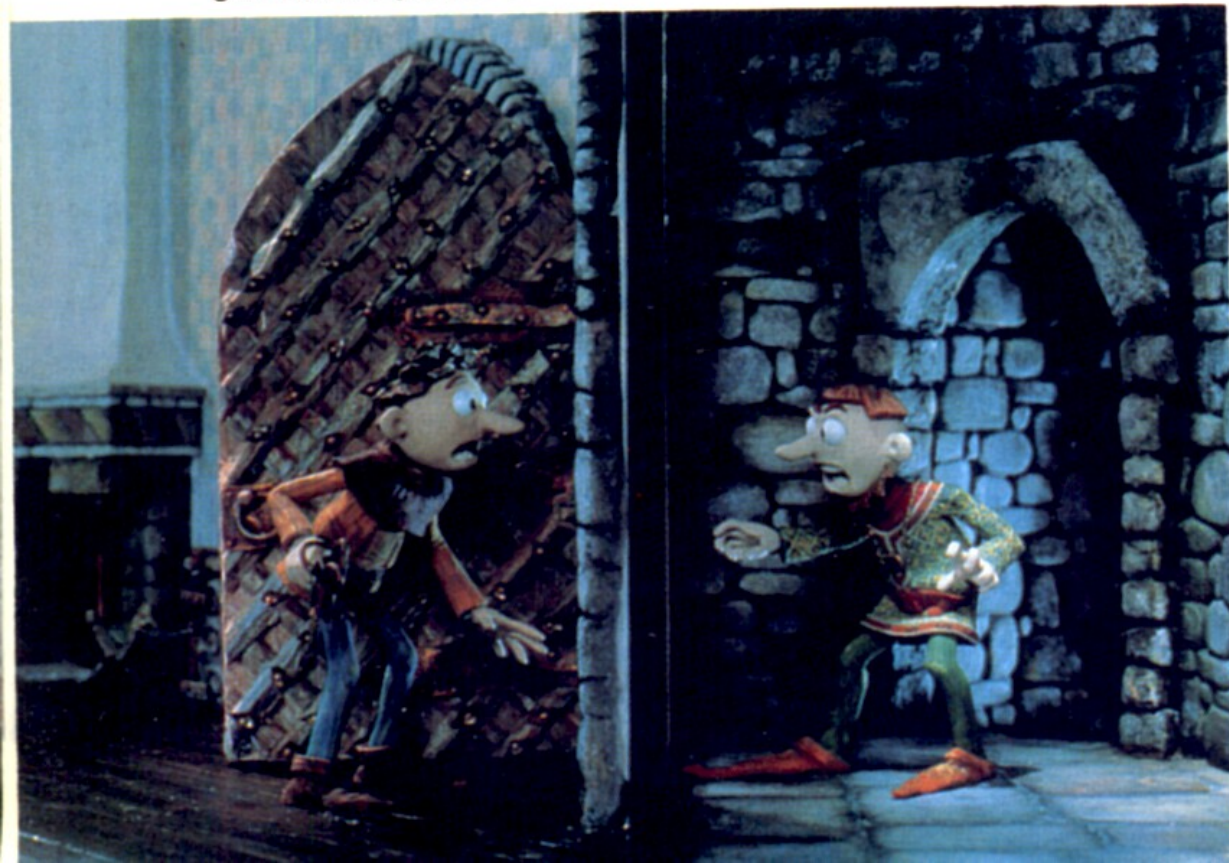
Nowhere is this truer than in stop-motion animation. As one of the founders of the acclaimed studio, Aardman Animation, Lord says that to him nothing can take the place of stop-motion, even if, in this age of CGI, it seems a bit like driving a horse and carriage while everyone else is behind the wheel of a Ferrari.

"The great thing about it is that it's a very human activity," explained Lord. "The puppets are tactile. You grab the puppet with two hands; one hand holds the hips; one hand holds the shoulders; and you can sort of feel all the dynamics of the body—you can sense the weight and the way it should move."

Lord also adds that there is a certain element that separates stop-motion, not only from its newer computer brethren, but from its traditional, hand-drawn relatives, as well. "With stop-frame, if you're going from point A to point Z, you start at A and you can only get to Z by going through B, C, D, E, and so on. You have to work your way through from start to finish. It's sequential, like real life. Whereas, in other forms of animation, you may do A and Z and then fill in the gaps between. I think that's easier, but our way is more satisfying—when it works!"

This process has been working quite well since 1972, when Lord first began Aardman with David Sproxton. During these early days, Lord remembers that the animation industry hadn't yet rebounded into its current state. "If

After Wat is drafted and brought to the castle, he and Earl inadvertently get their first glimpse of each other and realize the truth of the situation.



you could jump back to 1972, you'd be in terrible shock at the state [animation] was in. There was no life in it. It was such hard work for us that we nearly gave up. You couldn't get any decent commissions. Nobody accepted that it was a medium for anyone other than kids. Now, I love what's happening, especially with American TV shows. They have clever, sophisticated script writing and adult ideas. I also love the diversity, the fact that the viewing public and/or the studios seem to have accepted that there are many different ways to tell a story."

Lord and Sproston's early animated efforts were commissioned by the BBC, allowing the two struggling animators to set up Aardman. Their continued projects led to a collaboration with singer Peter Gabriel in 1986, when Aardman produced animation for the music video *SLEDGEHAMMER*.

In 1992, Lord and Aardman gained attention for *ADAM*. Told without a straightforward narrative, the short is essentially a series of gags, in which the animator's hand/God tries to deal with the awkward, lonely, and temperamental first man.

Last year's *WAT'S PIG*, a *PRINCE AND THE PAUPER*-like story of twin brothers separated at birth, brought Lord and Aardman more acclaim and another Academy Award nomination.

Lord came up with the film's original concept while on holiday in France, where he spotted some of the country's picturesque castles. "At one point, there were two castles only two or three miles from one another," continued Lord. "It suddenly occurred to me, 'Gosh, what must life have been like for the people in the middle?'"

Once the story was refined, Peter made the decision to make *WAT'S PIG* unique, by having the majority of the film shown in split screen. The audience is shown how the actions of the Earl affect that of the peasant, Wat, and how the twin brothers sometimes do things simultaneously.

This of course created a continuity nightmare. "I never put together the two elements, until everything was shot," admitted Lord. "That meant that you didn't



Director-animator Peter Lord poses with a stop-motion figure of Wat.

know what the image was going to look like on the screen until you finished the whole thing, which is obviously a major problem. Trying to get the whole pace of the thing to work was very difficult."

During the filming, Lord worked in tandem with an assistant animator named Sam Fell, each taking a different segment of the story. "One of us would do half the screen, then give it to the other and say, 'Well, now, you do your half,'" explained Lord. "We'd then have to match the timing and the staging to what had been done."

The end result of *WAT'S PIG* is an amazing visual experience, backed up by pleasing art direction. "It looks like a child's illustration," observed Lord, "but there's a sophistication to it; underneath it somewhere there's a hard edge." This helps convey the subtle, and not so-subtle, messages in *WAT'S PIG*. The audience learns that the world is an imperfect place, but we can find joy in it, as Wat does, by finding pleasure in life's simpler things. "I'm cynical but optimistic," admitted Lord. "What I couldn't give the film was a 'fairy tale ending,' because

I don't think the world is like that. So, I didn't want Wat to become the king of the castle and live happily ever after, because that would be dishonest to me. But, I wanted an upbeat ending. My decision was to pull down the other brother, rather than lift up Wat."

Thanks to such films as *WAT'S PIG* and the growing popularity of Nick Park's

WALLACE AND GROMIT shorts, (e.g., *A CLOSE SHAVE*), Aardman's name continues to gain prominence in the animation industry and beyond. Last year, the Queen of England herself paid a royal visit to the Aardman studio. "Yeah, we're great mates with the Queen now, best of pals," joked Lord.

Recently, Aardman began vying for even greater recognition, with preproduction on their first full-length feature, *CHICKEN RUN*. Described by Nick Park as a "comedy thriller in the same spirit as *WALLACE AND GROMIT*," the film will be co-directed by Lord and Park. The script by Jack Rosenthal (*YENTL*) concerns Rocky and Ginger, two chickens in love who attempt to escape from their sinister Yorkshire chicken farm. "We feel that *A CLOSE SHAVE* is a good stepping stone toward [full-length features]," said Lord. "It was a semi-industrial process. For us the big worry has always been the story telling. That's our big obsession. All your other elements are pretty much out the window, if you haven't got your story telling right. But telling a story that's over 18 minutes long is something that we don't know about." Despite such uncharted territory, Lord laughs with an air of unconcern that seems worthy of one of Aardman's characters, as he sums up his feelings about the new project by saying, "I feel absurdly confident." □

In the film's non-fairy tale ending, the twins are reunited—as peasants.



AUSTIN POWERS: Writer-comedian Mike Myers on his Swingin' '60s spoof.

By Debra Warlick

With Mike Myers, you don't just get an interview; you get entertainment. As he jumps from one persona to another, giving dead-on impersonations and offering up too many self-deprecating comments to count, Myers remains low key and calm, never resorting to the frantic antics that have earned him raves.

While promoting, *AUSTIN POWERS: INTERNATIONAL MAN OF MYSTERY*, Myers recounted the obvious fun he had creating this project, which co-stars Elizabeth Hurley and features cameos from Mimi Rogers, Michael York, Robert Wagner, Tom Arnold, and Carrie Fisher.

Written by Myers, the movie features Austin Powers as the ultimate '60s British spy, with really bad teeth, who just wants to shag (the English equivalent for sexual relations, according to Myers). He returns from a deep freeze after 30 years to track down his nemesis, Dr. Evil—also played by Myers, with blue contacts, scar tissue around eye, and longer ear lobes.

Myers was inspired to write the comedy after hearing "Book of Love" by Burt Baccarach on the radio. "That song was evocative of a whole time I never

Agents Powers (Mike Myers) and Kensington (Elizabeth Hurley) make a narrow escape.



Gorgeous but lethal Fembots surround Austin Powers (Mike Myers), a psychedelic '60s spy thawed out of a cryogenic freeze in the unhip '90s.

got to be a part of. I started going out with girls in the early '80s, so I missed the sexual revolution, not that I could have done much about it—I had terrible acne, greasy hair, and was terribly shy," said Myers, wearing a slightly retro brown suede jacket with black shirt and jeans. "I started thinking of this character, talking like this character, 'Hey baby... Swinging, baby... Welcome to London.' I went home and started talking like that to my wife, and she thought it was very funny."

He then started writing and finished his first draft in three weeks. "I was used to writing fast because of *SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE*," he said. "I constantly rewrote it up until the day of shooting—it wasn't like I wrote it and that was it—but that first draft I got out really fast."

Soon afterward, New Line called Myers to see what he was up to. "I asked if they wanted to read it; then they green-lighted it. Then Suzanne Todd of Moving Pictures [Demi Moore's production company] said they would like to produce it."

When Myers wrote the story, he definitely had one actress in mind for the lead part of Vanessa Kensington, his character's love interest and partner: Elizabeth Hurley. "I wrote the part for her. I'd seen her in *PASSENGER 57*. I knew she could handle a gun and do all the action, and she reminds me of Emma Peel of *THE AVENGERS*. She is, of

course, a specimen. If aliens came and wanted one representative of the planet, I would point to her and say that we all look like that."

He said his wife was also swayed by Hurley's talent. "My wife and I had seen her in an interview and thought she was cool. And she was that and more. Very prepared but very silly—she liked to laugh," he said. "About 30 to 40 percent of the movie was improvised, and she loved that aspect of it."

Myers also has only nice things to say about the stars who had cameos: "Michael York—he is so British; all of the women loved him. Robert Wagner is the nicest man on the planet. Tom Arnold is hilarious."

Although Myers has found success in feature films, he misses TV. "I would love to go back on television; it has the best writing for comedians," he said.

And he should know. *SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE* effectively gave him his start in comedy. For fans of that show, Myers says there is hope of seeing some of his other characters on the big screen. "Dana Carvey and I routinely go and meet with people for movie projects," he said. "I would love to do movies on more SNL skits." So, if Myers has his way, be on the lookout for Dieter, the androgynous German of "Sprockets" or perhaps gossip-monger Linda Richman in "Coffee Talk" to make the leap to the big screen. □

AUSTIN POWERS: INTERNATIONAL MAN OF MYSTERY

Director: Jay Roach. Writer: Mike Myers. New Line Cinema, 5/97, 89 mins, PG-13. With: Mike Myers, Elizabeth Hurley, Michael York, Mimi Rogers, Robert Wagner, Carrie Fisher, Tom Arnold.

Myers pulls off a surprisingly effective spy spoof—surprising, because his previous attempt at genre parody, the Hitchcock takeoff *SO I MARRIED AN AX MURDERER*, betrayed a number of miscalculations that are repeated here: Myers again casts himself as a goofy character who nevertheless ultimately wins the beautiful leading lady (in this case, Elizabeth Hurley, who proves herself good enough to be in a real Bond film, not an ersatz one). In both cases, a more believable leading man with a flair for light comedy, rather than an outright comedian, might have done a better job.

Because of this, the film gets off to a weak start, generating fewer laughs than the tongue-in-cheek efforts (like *THE AVENGERS*) that it attempts to spoof—Roger Moore was a better Bond parody than this! The problem is the premise: Austin is supposed to be a groovy '60s character hopelessly lost now that he has re-emerged in the '90s, but he is such a geek that it's impossible to think of him as anything but a loser in any era. Fortunately, the jokes at his expense do grow funny; and even though the underlying assumption that he is irresistible to women remains a ludicrous conceit on the part of the star, the film does manage to incorporate, to good effect, the mechanics of every spy flick from *GOLDFINGER* to *GOLDFOOT*, milking clichés for laughs by twisting them just enough off center to reveal the humor.

Music and tech credits do a good job of capturing the '60s era, even though the film really isn't set in that time. Rather, they evoke some of the style that Powers brings with him, which intrudes upon the film in amusingly anachronistic ways—as when inserts of Austin performing with a psychedelic '60s-type band are used as a gaudy transitional device between scenes. Along the way, Michael York and Robert Wagner turn in effective supporting perfs (Tom Arnold's also around, but you better like crude bathroom humor to enjoy his scene). Even better is Mimi Rogers as a good Emma Peel surrogate during the '60s prologue (too bad there wasn't more of her).

The highlight of hilarity, however, is Myers' turn as Powers' nemesis, Dr. Evil. Here, the actor truly shines, giving a brilliant send-up of supervillains (in particular Bond perennial Ernst Stavro Blofeld). It is side-splitting funny to see the revived Evil learn that his empire's legit business earnings in the '90s now outgross his evil schemes, or to watch him attempt to forge a familial bond with his estranged, artificially conceived son—which includes a trip to group therapy (and a fun cameo from Fisher). Seeing this alienated über-villain pour his soul out to strangers is priceless; these scenes make the film must viewing for spy fans.

●● 1/2 Steve Biodrowski



LASERBLAST

by Dennis Fischer

THE HAMSTER FACTOR:

Terry Gilliam's brilliance shines bright on disc

Few filmmakers have embraced the laserdisc medium as Terry Gilliam has, and few are better suited to it. His is a uniquely visual imagination, with consistent themes that crop up time and again, often featuring an unperceptive individual who comes to realize society's shortcomings and underlying callousness and is transformed by coming into contact with creativity and madness.

Ironical for someone who is primarily hailed as a cinematic visualist, Gilliam's only Oscar nomination was for co-writing the screenplay of *BRAZIL*. Furthermore, his talent for working with actors has often been overlooked, though both Mercedes Ruehl's performance in *THE FISHER KING* and Brad Pitt's in *12 MONKEYS* received Academy nominations, and Ruehl actually won.

Universal Pictures has released *12 MONKEYS* in both a regular and a Signature Edition. The regular edition is a superior letterboxed transfer, but the Signature Edition shines with the addition of Gilliam's and producer Charles Roven's informative commentary. Also, it is the only way, outside of a film festival, to see *THE HAMSTER FACTOR AND OTHER TALES OF TWELVE MONKEYS*, a 90-minute documentary on the making of the film. *THE HAMSTER FACTOR*, by talented documentarians Keith Fulton and Louis Pepe, is not the standard promo film but an interesting record of *12 MONKEYS*' production, which shows the many moods of Gilliam, from jubilant to petulant, while during filming, and records his witty comments on the reactions he has received and on why the process can become an elaborate and harrowing one.

The documentary's title refers to a brief shot in *12 MONKEYS*, when Cole (Bruce Willis, in an atypically vulnerable performance), returned to the future, is seen in the background, while obscurely in the foreground a hamster is running in a wheel—an aspect important enough for Gilliam to spend a great deal of time on an otherwise simple shot in order to achieve it. While it could easily be overlooked, the hamster does add symbolically to the film (Cole has made no progress, having just been running in circles), and it is attention to such



Gilliam's 1995 hit *12 MONKEYS* (above) was recently released on a special disc, with the behind the scenes documentary *THE HAMSTER FACTOR*.

visual touches that marks Gilliam as a major filmmaker.

From his commentaries, it is apparent that Gilliam puts a good deal of thought into his films. We hear how he was careful to maintain ambiguity as to whether Cole was actually from the future or merely mad; how a simple description in the script by David and Janet Peoples became an elaborate visual; and how Gilliam wanted the film to begin and end on the eyes of young Cole, and hoped to use budget problems (inventing an elaborate, expensive shot) to keep from filming what proved to be the actual final scene.

Despite the difficulties he had with Universal over *BRAZIL*, the regime had changed, and Roven, keen to work with Gilliam, if he stuck to an agreed budget, sent him the Peoples' script. Gilliam expresses a lot of respect for the work of the writers, who were inspired by the short French classic *LA JETÉE*. (My one complaint about this expensive box set is that, although there is room on the discs, the original Chris Marker film is not included.) Gilliam also praises Universal's marketing department for their wonderful work promoting the film.

Perhaps the most notable aspect revealed by the documentary is that *12 MONKEYS* did poorly in previews, panicking the studio. Gilliam had insisted on and re-

ceived final cut, however, and the film was not altered. It is, therefore, satisfying to report that the film was an acclaimed hit that grossed over \$160 million worldwide, calling into question the entire preview process.

Universal's Signature Collection of *12 MONKEYS* is only the latest in a long line of special edition discs of Gilliam's films. Most of his work remains available, with the exception of his animated opening credits for Gordon Hessler's *Vincent Price* vehicle, *CRY OF THE BANSHEE*, once available on a now out-of-print HBO double disc with *COUNT YORGA, VAMPIRE*. In addition to his directorial work, his early animation and acting are available on Paramount Video's series of *MONTY PYTHON* episodes. The best sketches of the series were recreated for the film *AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT* (Columbia/TriStar), which features several classic pieces of Gilliam animation.

Gilliam's first live-action directing effort was *MONTY PYTHON AND THE HOLY GRAIL*, which is available in letterboxed editions from both Criterion and Columbia/TriStar. Criterion edges out Columbia's edition because it offers commentary by Gilliam and co-director Terry Jones. The collaboration had its rough spots, but eventually Jones

settled into directing the cast while Gilliam managed the visuals, using a \$500,000 budget to achieve an epic look, with nods to Ken Russell and Pier Paolo Pasolini (whose *CANTERBURY TALES* was one key inspiration). The Criterion disc also includes a brief snipped gag reinserted into the film; the Japanese soundtrack of the taunting by the French scene—re-translated into English subtitles (so that, for example, the Holy Grail becomes a "sacred wine glass"); and the film's very amusing trailer.

Gilliam's first solo project, the misguided and unfunny *JABBERWOCKY*, remains unavailable, but Paramount and Pioneer did a fine job of remastering *TIME BANDITS*, Gilliam's first hit, for laser. Gilliam also created the elaborate 16-minute "Crimson Private Insurance" sequence and the animated main titles for *MONTY PYTHON'S THE MEANING OF LIFE* (MCA/Universal). The short, a visual elaboration of the idea of modern corporations as pirates, is graphically dynamic in a way that Terry Jones's footage is not. Unfortunately, this early MCA transfer is not as sharp as their subsequent efforts and lacks digital encoding.

A big improvement over the previous MCA release is Criterion's deluxe box set of *BRAZIL*, which topped our list of best laserdisc releases for 1996. This "ultimate special edition" five-disc set not only features the entire film in CAV for frame-by-frame analysis of this movie masterpiece; it also has screenwriters Tom Stoppard and Charles McKeown elaborating on the script's development, Norman Garwood's detailed set designs, costume designer James Acheson's explanation for how he combined fashion and fascism, Gilliam's storyboards for the unfilmed "eyeball" dream, composer Michael Kamen's comments on his score, a study of the special effects, Rob Hedden's half-hour documentary *WHAT IS "BRAZIL"?*, and Jack Matthews' *THE BATTLE OF "BRAZIL": A VIDEO HISTORY*, with Gilliam, producer Arnon Milchan, and studio executives Frank Price, Marvin Antonowski, Bob Rehme, and Sidney Sheinberg presenting their sides of the controversy over which cut to release.

What becomes apparent is that

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the studio execs were not crass philistines but men who hoped to increase the commercial appeal of the film, even to its detriment as a whole. Gilliam makes a convincing case that Sam Lowry (Jonathan Pryce) is not meant to be an entirely sympathetic character and that some of the uncomfortable aspects were deliberately inserted to raise troubling issues. Gilliam uses wide angle lenses to get the most out of his limited sets, which wonderfully evoke George Orwell's 1984 while combining elements from several eras to indicate that the film is as much about the present as about a possible dismal future.

This edition includes footage from the longer European version (which received limited U.S. distribution in the early '90s). This cut makes it clear that Sam spent the night with Kim Griest's character before the police terminate her (there is no question here that she was killed and that Sam's reuniting with her must be a fantasy), and shows how the oppressive regime bills suspects for the costs of their capture and the electricity expended in torturing confessions out of them, offering credit plans to help meet those expenses. The set ends with the awful "love conquers all" tele-version of BRAZIL, which was truncated, rescored, and re-edited to make Sam a more conventional hero. Commentator David Morgan supplies an alternate track commentary to note the effects of the numerous alterations to Gilliam's intended vision.

THE ADVENTURES OF BARON MUNCHAUSEN remains one of the most visually splendid fantasies ever committed to celluloid. The deluxe Criterion edition features a superior transfer in CAV, accompanied on the second analog track by yet another informative commentary from Gilliam, who reveals, for example, that the role of the Moon King was originally intended for Sean Connery rather than Robin Williams and that the producers tried to lure Marlon Brando to play Vulcan instead of Oliver Reed, who proves delightfully batty in the role. The set also features storyboards for unfilmed sequences, production designs, deleted scenes wisely cut out, and other goodies, including brief (faded) samples from two other fine filmings of the Münchausen tale, Josef Von Baky's MÜNCHAUSEN (1943) and Karel Zeman's BARON PRÁŠIL (1962).

The special effects are stylized rather than convincing, echoing the elaborate theatrical environment from which the Baron spins

his lies, upset that, in the retelling, people are altering his version of the "truth"—an assertion that an artist be allowed to stay true to his vision and that lies and fiction can carry truths in them. The film is certainly worth revisiting for Dante Ferretti's gorgeous production design and Giuseppe Rotunno's stunning photography (which never looked better than it does on Criterion's disc). Also noteworthy is that cult Italian director Michel Soavi (CEMETERY MAN) handled the second unit direction.

The boxoffice failure of MUNCHAUSEN led to Gilliam's accepting a Hollywood project, THE FISHER KING. The film uses Arthurian legends as a template for the story of Jack (Jeff Bridges, in one of his best performances), a shock jock in need of redemption. He is a talented "man of the people" who has lost touch with the people and must plummet to the depths of society, where he encounters Parry (Robin Williams), a homeless man whose life was forever changed by a careless remark of Jack's; with Parry's help, Jack must finally regain his lost humanity.

Gilliam brilliantly realizes the possibilities in Richard LaGravenese's script, and once more the Criterion transfer beats the non-boxed Columbia/TriStar in terms of color and framing. The Criterion edition also includes running commentary by Gilliam, six deleted scenes appended after the movie on the final side, original trailers, comparisons between shots from the film and the storyboards for them, as well as costume tests for the cast.

Gilliam's features are so rich that one notices and enjoys them more on each re-viewing; they are, therefore, perfect fare for laserdisc, where each detail can be preserved with crisp sharpness unavailable on anything short of celluloid or DVD. His movies remind us of what magical can truly mean. □

VOLCANO

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impersonal, and relentless foe. His brief moment of hopeless doubt toward the end is surprisingly effective bit of drama amidst the overwhelming action.

With a faster pace and a far more intense handling of the suspense sequences, not to mention great effects and some memorably melodramatic moments of self-sacrifice, this film definitely surpasses DANTE'S PEAK as the year's best volcano movie. Although that rival production was a reasonably good run through of this subject, it fades in comparison

to this vastly superior effort. The satirical sense of humor here is definitely an important asset in this equation, but at least as important is the sense of momentum and narrative drive generated by the most basic of plot mechanics. Whereas DANTE'S PEAK was structured around waiting for the volcano to blow, and then running away once it erupted, VOLCANO doesn't really leave its characters an escape route. Therefore, they are forced to stand and fight, to confront the situation with whatever tools are at the disposal, however inadequate they may be. The result is a cast of fairly believably drawn characters suddenly thrust into a situation in which they must rise to almost mythic levels of achievement.

Or, to put it more simply, they are actually trying to do something to stop the disaster, instead of simply staying out of its way. This makes all the difference in the world, and the result is one of the most exciting, action-packed, and all-around entertaining films of the year. □

MIMIC

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balance between beauty and repellence, which is partly what the film is about. It's a fascination with the subject matter of film that draws you in and repels you at the same time. It looks very beautiful. But also I must say that MIMIC is not a conventional story of two action movie heroes and heroines, who kind of rip their shirts off, bristling their muscles and go, 'Eat this motherfucker!' It's not that kind of movie."

Whatever kind of film MIMIC, one can only hope it will remain true to the passion of that little kid who grew up across the Rio Grande. "I've tried to always know what I was doing," said del Toro, who is an admitted comic book addict. "I try to say, 'This is what I want out of this movie.' Be it a creative experience. Be it a learning experience. Be it an expressive experience. As long as I don't get lost. If I wake up in the morning one day and go, 'Maybe it would be good for my career if I try to diversify, I'm fucked! Or if I say, 'My perception in the industry is so and so. Perhaps I would do better if...' I'm fucked! The moment you enter that treadmill, you might as well be dead.

"I think it's a gesture of faith from the studio, to put us up against the summer blockbusters. It doesn't worry me, being that this is my first big release. From what I have gathered, as a watcher of the business or as a person now involved in the business, no one

knows what happens. You can do well. You can do bad. Those conjectures are often invalid in both cases. You can say, 'Oh yeah, it failed because of this! Oh yes, it succeeded because of that!' But who really knows? I am not nervous because that is not part of my craft. That's not part of what I do. Exhibition, marketing, distribution and how well the movie does commercially—that's not part of my work. I just try to tell the story." □

PSYCHOTRONIC

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bulk of the video reviews. A small but dedicated group of contributors add book reviews, music reviews, and interviews with B-movie stars and exploitation filmmakers. "Some people wouldn't consider it a fanzine because we accept advertising, but it's still done with no office, no full staff; my wife and I still mail them all ourselves, so in that way I do consider it a fanzine. I intend to keep doing it, and hope to improve it, and I'd like to put it out more often. I have high hopes for the magazine in the future, and what's going to be available to see [on video], both older movies that have been rediscovered and whatever's about to come out is totally unpredictable and always exciting."

While the first *Psychotronic(R)* book was unique for 1983, the new volume must fight for space on bookshelves bursting with genre-film tomes. "You have a whole book now on Jesus Franco. Who would have thought it?" he pondered. "You have whole books with interviews with people like Jean Rollins. It's exciting and perplexing that so much of it gets written about these days. It's also becoming extreme overkill, and I can't imagine what things are going to be like even ten years from now. It's like sitting around and trying to think about how many stars are in the universe."

Yet, Weldon's new publishers have already expressed interest in future, updated editions of *The Psychotronic Video Guide*. "What I would like to do is make some kind of deal so that both books could be combined into one, not-too-huge book. Of course, I've had offers to put them on CD-ROM or whatever, which I think would be a pretty big project, but it certainly could happen." This is in addition to the Web-site currently being planned for *Psychotronic(R) Video*. All this from a little weekly fanzine devoted to giving films like WAR OF THE COLOSSAL BEAST the attention that *TV Guide* and *The New York Times* denied them. □

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STEEL

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through. It is an extraordinarily difficult sequence."

"It is a very poignant scene, and it is really meaningful in the development of my character," added Gish. "I had to develop my upper body strength to do those maneuvers. The consultant showed me basically what it was like and how I could make it appear that my legs had no feeling. She worked with me for two weeks prior to filming. It was an incredibly intense experience. She became a role model for me."

The scene sums up Johnson's view of the picture—which, he said, "is about stretching yourself and becoming more than you could be."

As with most major films today, fans can expect several promotional tie-ins with STEEL. Simon is proud of one toy in particular: "They are making an action figure with Sparky. It is one of the first toys that is about a handicapped person," the producer said, with justifiable pride. He added, "DC will do a special book for the film. STEEL will also appear on the animated Superman series on the WB network for the kids. We also have a deal with Hasbro-Kenner for a toy line. We

aren't BATMAN, but we've done a lot."

There are hopes that STEEL could become a franchise film for the studio. "Shaquille has agreed to do more films if we get a sequel going," explained Simon. "You have to understand, though, that everything comes down to money. If this can perform at the boxoffice and people can grasp what we are trying to do, I think we have a real good shot at future films." □

STEEL DC COMICS

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they made is that they took a villain I created called The White Rabbit and split her in two. In the comic book she was a fellow scientist who was working with John Henry Irons on weapons development in the military. She is also sort of a love interest, but she becomes a bad guy.

"In a comic book, it is good to have a villain who is also somewhat romantically inclined to the hero. It creates an ongoing sexual tension. In the movie you have a self-contained story, so it made sense to split her up into Nathaniel Burke and Sparks."

Bogdanove pointed out one change that especially pleased him, because of the casting:

"They gave Steel another sidekick, Uncle Joe," he said. "My reaction was, 'Damn, Steel must be cool. He has Shaft for an uncle!' I'm a big Richard Roundtree fan, and I'll be interested to see how he plays this."

According to Bogdanove, the film script has an inside joke for fans of the detective Roundtree played during a trio of movies in the early '70s (SHAFT, SHAFT'S BIG SCORE, and SHAFT IN AFRICA). "After they've built the armor, John Henry, Sparks, and Uncle Joe are sitting around discussing all the armaments they've devised. Sparks shows how the hammer turns into a gun, and Uncle Joe says, 'My favorite part is the shaft.'"

As is to be expected, DC will have some tie-ins related directly to the film. Simonson and Bogdanove are doing the graphic novelization of the film, which Macavee will be editing. There will also be two paperback novelizations: one for younger readers and one for older ones. A trade paperback novelization will feature the stories from Steel's development in the *Reign of Superman* series, as well as several of his first comics.

"Ironically, I am drawing the

comic book adaptation of the movie adaptation of my comic book," said Bogdanove. "It is like drawing an alternate universe. I recognize this stuff, and I don't recognize this stuff." Simonson has a philosophical reaction to doing the graphic novelization. "He is still the same old Steel I was writing. He can just do different things and has different friends."

The fact that Shaquille O'Neal has been cast as the lead doesn't seem to surprise either artist. Said Bogdanove, "When you create a character there is a tendency to wonder who could play this guy. I don't know too many people who could do this besides Shaq. He is not just tall but he is muscular, too, like a superhero. He must have been fearsome walking around the movie set in that armor."

Though neither Bogdanove nor Simonson has seen any part of the production as yet, they have seen hundreds of photos from the film and both have read the script. Bogdanove sums up their feelings by saying, "This is not the INCREDIBLE HULK TV show and it is not the BATMAN movie. It is somewhere in between. We'll just have to wait and see how it turns out." □

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LETTERS

POWER 50 MEA CULPA

I must disavow myself of many of the changes that were made in my *Sci-Fi Power 50 List* [28:12:32] by the editors without my input.

A number of the positions of talent were changed, people added and many people moved down or off the list entirely. Much to my chagrin, I did not learn that several people had been dropped off the list and put on the "Falling Stars" list until I got my issue in the mail.

To include such significant players as the Trilogy Producing Partners, Tracy Torme, Glen Morgan & James Wong and William Shatner, who are not only talented, creative and significant genre players as "Falling Stars" is an indignity. Their output and talent clearly illustrate this is anything but the case. All have major projects in various stages of development.

Others such as Chris Carter were moved lower on the list while a number of additional individuals were bumped up on the list and actors added that never appeared on my list at any time. The inclusion of David Lynch and Cronenberg who were part of "Comeback Trail" onto the Power 50 list is the strangest change of all.

The published version of the Power 50 in no way reflects my views and I wish to disassociate myself from the published version.

Mark A. Altman
Beverly Hills, CA

[No indignity or slight to anyone was intended. Changes in position were made strictly on the basis of boxoffice gross and Nielsen rating points, sadly the basis of power in Hollywood.]

DISSING "LOST IN SPACE"

It looks to me that your reporter has it in for LOST IN SPACE. [28:12:6] Boy, talk about a raking over the hot coals! This person did everything but come right out and say "I hate LOST IN SPACE!" CFQ, why did you give them this reporting job? They can't be fair!

LOST IN SPACE does have a lot of fans—more than enough to not only give TREK a run for its money, but to fill up the last two LOST IN SPACE cons that I've been at, too!

James B. Cash
Cerritos, CA

[We can assure you the reporter in question will not be handling our forthcoming cover story on LOST IN SPACE. See this issue's interview with Akiva Goldsman for a

peek at the production, page 36.]

IN DEFENSE OF STOP MOTION

As a stop motion animator (first at Will Vinton Productions, then independently for commercials, and JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH) I was disappointed to read the article about the new SINBAD series in the March issue [28:9:56]. Ed Naha is quoted as saying that they wanted to use stop motion animation but that "It is impossible to do on a show like this one." He also says, "It is one of those time consuming techniques where you are always going to be behind when filming on a tight schedule."

Now more than ever stop motion is a viable effects medium, particularly with digital compositing for video resolution being the quick turnaround service industry that it is today.

Since SINBAD is cashing in on the success of HERCULES it makes sense that they would want to use the same techniques. Unfortunately, the producers of SINBAD don't have former stop motion animator Doug Beswick heading up their animation crew. Ed Naha says, "You want them to look like the monsters in MYSTERIOUS ISLAND, not the ones in JACK THE GIANT KILLER."

Instead he got creatures that look like they walked out of a coin-op video game.

Webster Colcord
via e-mail

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Start with our next monthly issue (shown right), a look at the recent trend in "Vampire Femmes" by film scholars James Irsini and Alain Silver, writers of the authoritative book, *The Vampire Film*, fully illustrated with alluring photos of the cinema's most beautiful bloodsuckers. Also in the same issue, Uma Thurman on her jaw-dropping role as Poison Ivy in the summer hit BATMAN & ROBIN, Melissa Joan Hart on playing ABC's Archie Comics series adaptation SABRINA, THE TEENAGE WITCH, filming Roger Corman's latest Femme Vampire saga CLUB VAMPIRE, featuring Star An-dreef, Mike Myers on his sexy James Bond spoof AUSTIN POWERS, Hilary Sheperd Turner on her sexy scenery-chewing role as Divatox in POW-ER RANGERS 2, plus the making of Full Moon's compilation BIMBO MOVIE BASH, and much more! Subscribe today and pick up those back is-sues you may have missed.

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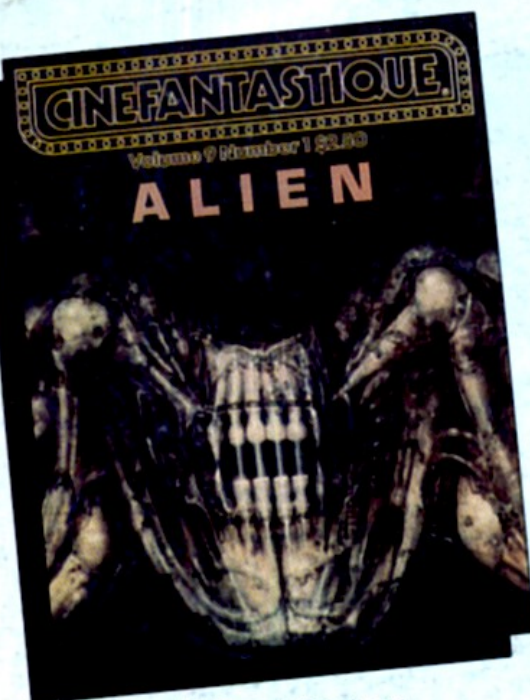
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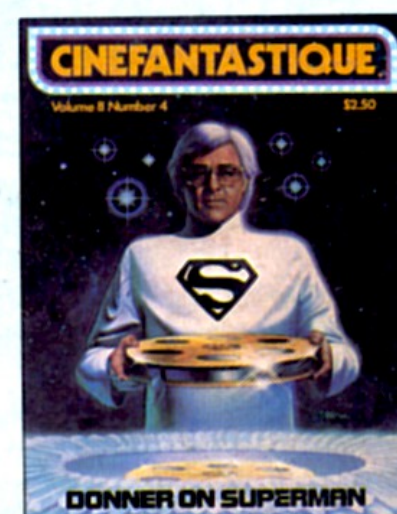
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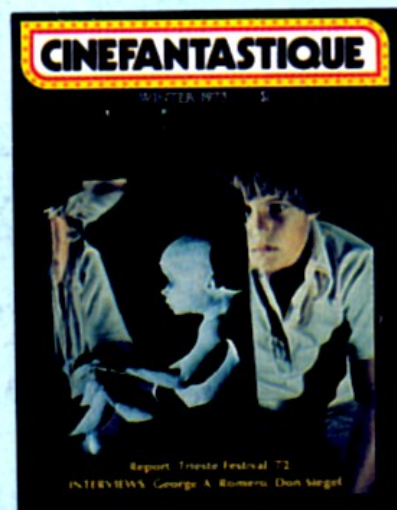
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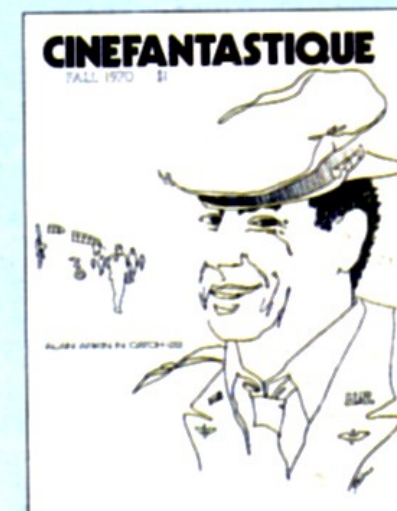
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